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OnOurBacks

june.july 2004

THE BEST OF LESBIAN SEX

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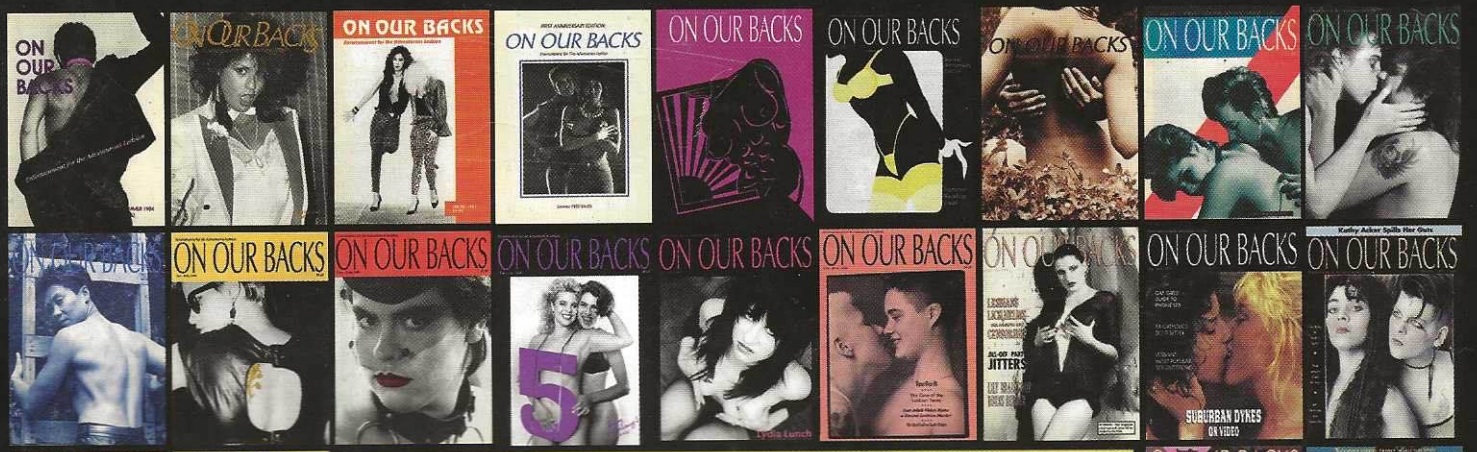

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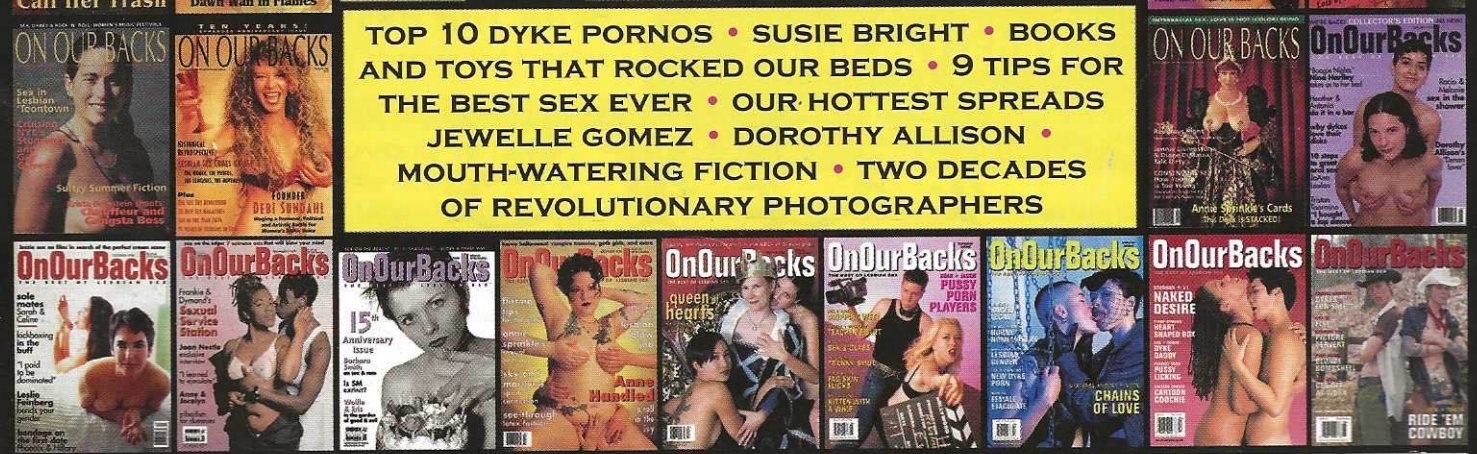

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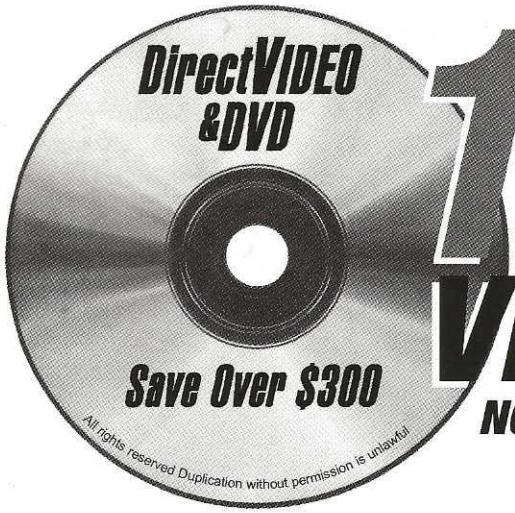

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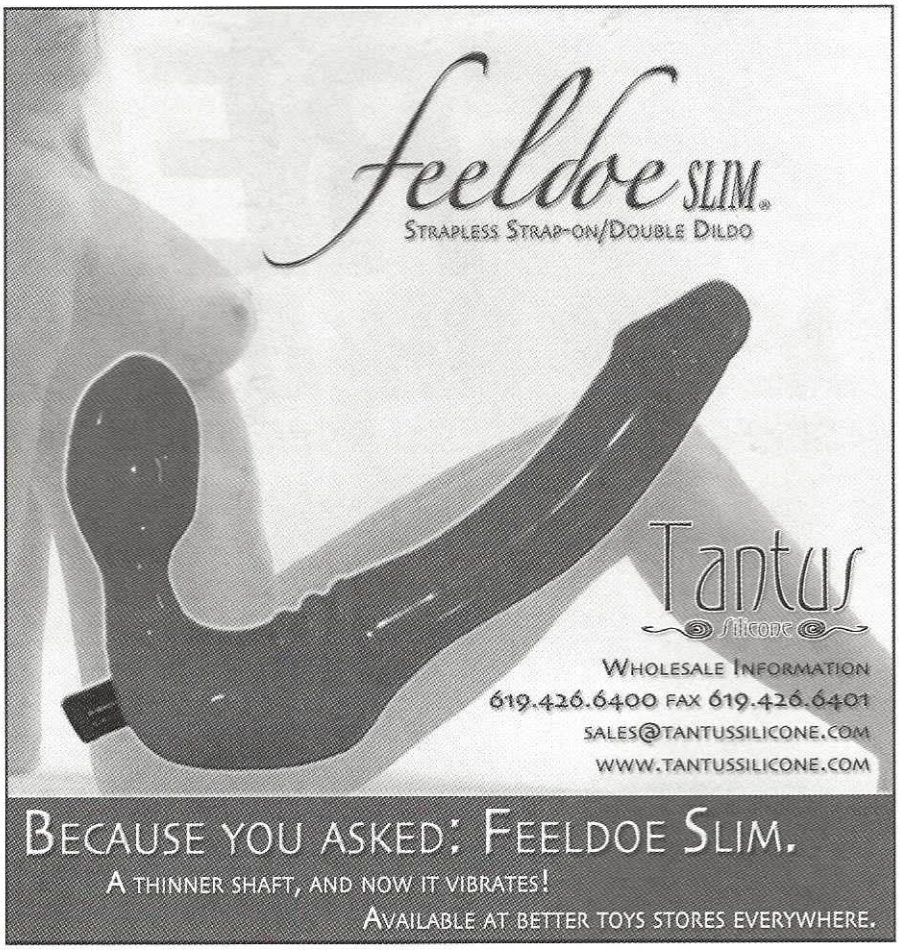

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Volume19 . Issue01

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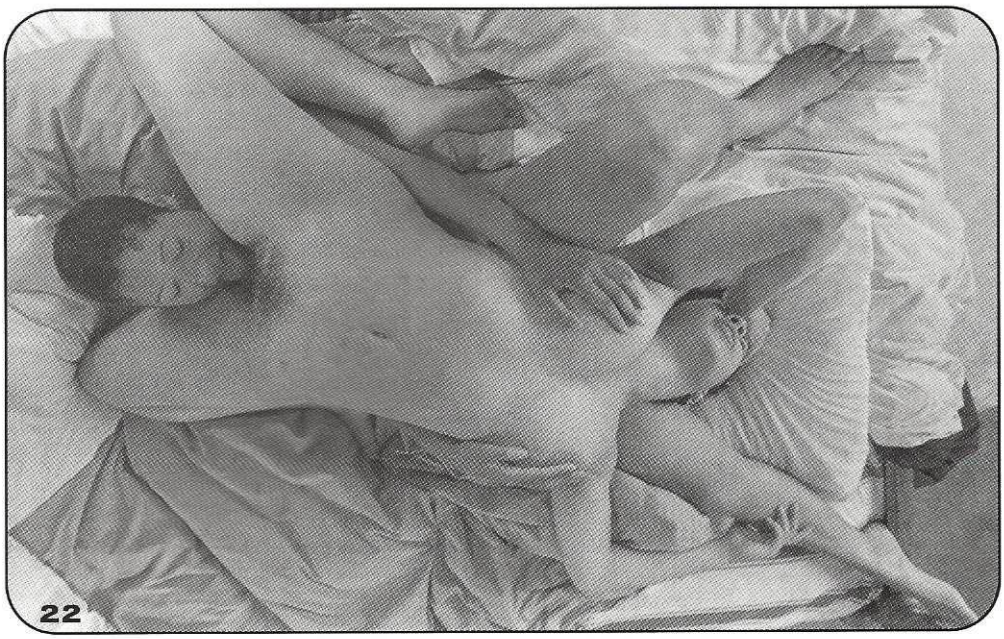

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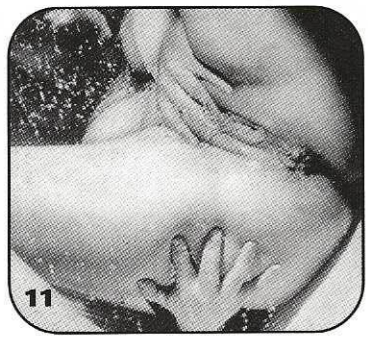

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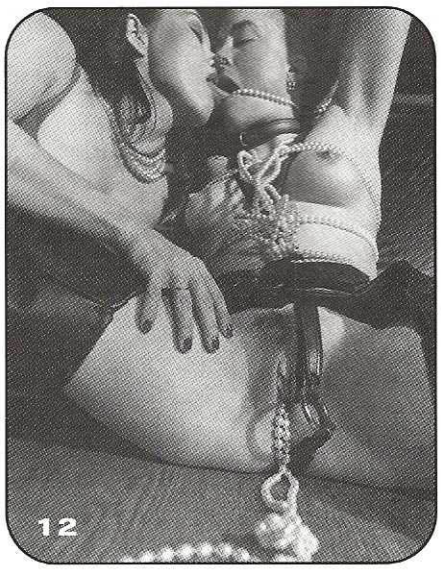

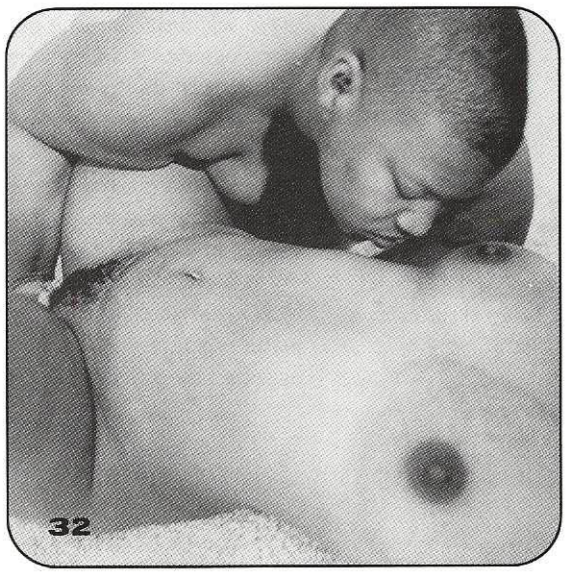

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editor's.postcard

SHELLEY AMRICH

I had fun researching the archives.

In Bed with *On Our Backs*

We spent weeks perusing the **On Our Backs** archives to come up with this issue. Our art department staff were troopers. They spent hours scanning old photos. That's me in the picture to the left–in bed with as many old copies as I could find. We were pretty lucky that an almost full archive existed. Many photos from the early years of On Our Backs–designed before digital archives were common–were destroyed by a self-storage locker company in 1996. Fatale Video, the dyke porn company formed by the original **On Our Backs** producers (see page 28) has a full set of back issues, and we have a mostly full set in our offices. Otherwise, you'd have to hit GLBT historical societies to check out the eighties hairdos, and studded leather bras.

Over the last twenty years the magazine has filled a great need for sex-positive erotica for women. Happily we now have many wonderful erotic anthologies available to us, but when **On Our Backs** first started, there was no other outlet for erotic lesbian writing and photography. **On Our Backs** launched the careers of many of today's most important queer women writers and artists. Jewelle Gomez graced our very first issue. I'm proud to include her first story on page 38. Dorothy Allison was also an early **On Our Backs** contributor. Turn to page 40 to read her essay "What She Did With Her Hands." That story makes my cunt clench more than any erotica.

In 1996 **On Our Backs** hit financial hard times. Luckily our parent company, H.A.F. Publishing, bought its assets and relaunched it in 1998, providing us with the hot, glossy sex rag you now hold in your hands. Now–thanks in many ways to this magazine–we are in the middle of a great sexual era. Queer women are more sexually aware, sex-positive, and visible than we've ever been before. Hell, most of us on staff are so busy enjoying ourselves we barely have time to do our jobs. **On Our Backs** does more than show us how to get it on, it celebrates our sexuality and normalizes it for us and the rest of society. And then, at the end of the day, **On Our Backs** helps us to appreciate all the fun we're having.

We wanted this issue of the magazine to be a showcase for the many wonderful artists who've made us so great. Turn to page 12 for a look at four photographers that have helped shape us. On page 22 you can see three of our hottest centerfolds, and on page 32, you'll find over fifty of the sexiest images we've ever published.

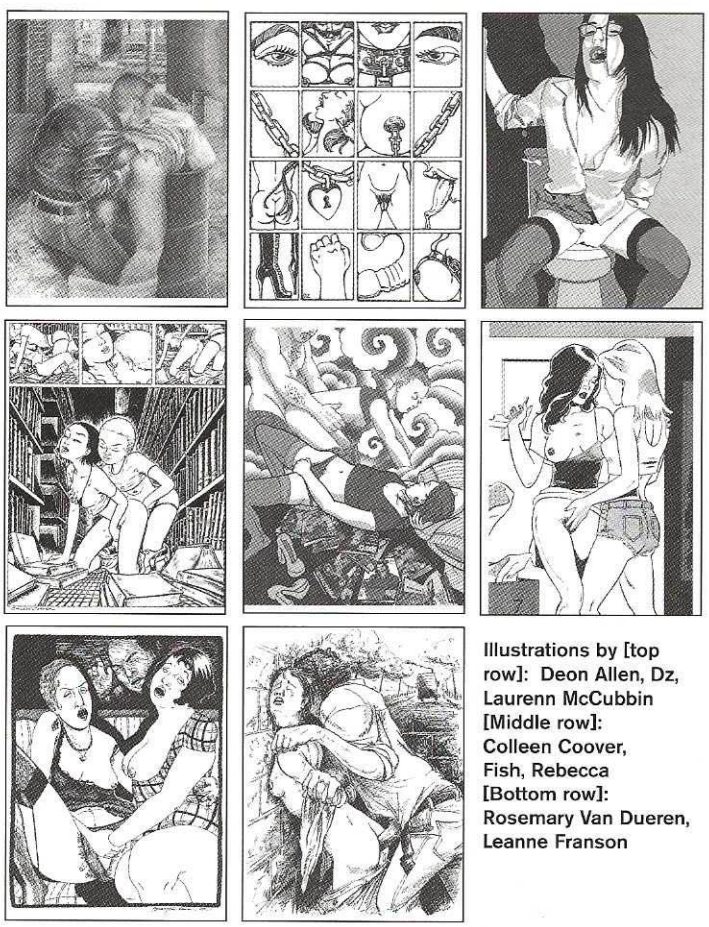
Our illustrators have created so many beautiful images over the years. We've included a few of our favorites on this page for your enjoyment.

We hope you enjoy this collector's edition of **On Our Backs**. Next issue you'll find a completely redesigned magazine, with more features, more photography, and more exciting content than we've ever had before. Dig in!

XOXO,

Diana Cage

Diana Cage, Editor



Illustrations by [top row]: Deon Allen, Dz, Laurenn McCubbin [Middle row]: Colleen Coover, Fish, Rebecca [Bottom row]: Rosemary Van Dueren, Leanne Franson

After a few years, you learn a thing or two.

Everyone at Blowfish would like to salute the 20th anniversary of *On Our Backs*... after all, it's our ***10th*** anniversary!

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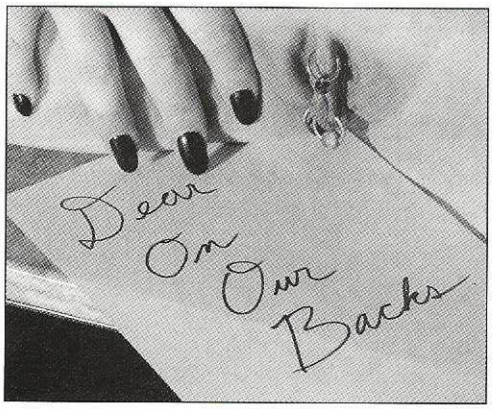

DARKPLAY.NET

Dildos, SM, and trannies—oh my! Name the hot-button sexual topic, and dykes have debated it in **On Our Backs**' letters page. Here is a selection of some of our most controversial.

Rape of the Schlock

Dec.Jan 1998

The dildo pictorials in **On Our Backs** seem to follow a pathological pattern. Judging from the photos in "Driving Ms. Diesel" (August/September 1998), the femme might be in considerable discomfort and the bulldyke must get off from humiliating this femme, because it doesn't seem likely that the strap-on could give her much physical sensation. So we've got two people going through the motions of rape without any indication that either of them is going to attain an orgasm.

Name withheld
Washington, D.C.

Thanks for the Compliment

Aug.Sept 2001

A specific and factual determination has been made that the June/July 2001 issue of **On Our Backs** is detrimental to prisoners' rehabilitation because it would encourage deviated criminal sexual behavior. The magazine contains graphic depiction of sado-masochism and explicit images of women engaging in homosexual activity.

Texas Department of Criminal Justice
Huntsville, Texas

Unnatural Lust

Aug.Sept 1999

As a 48-year-old out for all of my adult life, I think women have all the natural equipment necessary to please one another. Neither I nor my partner have ever needed a penis substitute. I'm also very disturbed by SM. Considering all the violence and hatred inflicted upon us for our sexuality, I wish it wasn't a part of your magazine. I'm saddened that some of us would do this to each other. It's demeaning, controlling, and certainly contrary to respect for a partner or oneself.

Name withheld
Via the Internet

Looking for Lesbians

Feb.Mar 2002

On Our Backs and today's lesbian erotica collections make me seriously concerned about the absence of lesbianism in lesbian culture. I would once again like to see **On Our Backs** celebrate writers who see that butch is a proud and strong lesbian gender unto itself, that it has nothing to do with being a man. I'd also like to see femme writers who value their own femaleness and understand that it is a treasure to give to the women they love.

Joy Parks
Ottawa, Canada

Joystick Killjoy

Aug.Sept 2001

I find terribly disturbing the blatant and overwhelming imagery of male power: the faux penis/dildo being sucked, rammed into a vagina, and regarded as *the* joystick of lesbian love. More than half of the content featured in **On Our Backs** is particularly offensive. There is nothing new or cutting edge here. It's about women who want to be men or who subsume this pervasive cultural stereotype of male superiority. And once more, the female body is raped, abused, and pillaged by supposed "lesbians" who appropriate the apparatus and misogynistic attitudes of the male. These persons are *not* lesbians.

Yael Boten
Via the Internet

Trannygirls, Please!

April.May 2002

I cannot begin to tell you how excited I am to see a transwoman in **On Our Backs**! (Jessica Choplin, December/January 2002). There are so few dyke spaces in which transwomen are treated as sexually desirable. It's so refreshing. I can't wait to see the pictorial of Jessica in the spring issue. You have my undying gratitude.

Alaina [last name withheld]
Via the Internet

Fat Chicks Rule

Dec.Jan 2002

I opened the June/July 2001 issue and the first thing I saw was a fat woman making love to her girlfriend! I know you are going to get some letters from fat-phobic twits who don't want to see that. Well, this is my letter saying that I *do* want to see that, and so do a lot of other women. Thanks for having the guts to do what other magazines are scared to–not that this is the first time you have done something others wouldn't do though, eh?

Name Withheld
Via the Internet

Gushing for Genderfuckers

Feb.Mar 2002

My friends and I love that you show things that no other magazines would even think of. The December/January 2002 issue was especially good. What do all the lesbians in middle America think of the article about giving blowjobs to strap-ons ("Suck Dyke Cock")?

Alana [last name withheld]
Oakland, California

Catholic Bad Girl

Oct.Nov 1998

On Our Backs was one of the first lesbian magazines I ever got my grubby little Catholic-schoolgirl hands on. That little magazine changed who I was: I went from a vanilla, anti-porn, lesbian feminist to a radical, pro-porn, SM dyke. As for the new **On Our Backs**, I was impressed–it had that same "underground" feel as the first. The use of black and white helped, not to mention the great writing and photography. You remained true to your roots while putting forward a nineties vibe–not easy, but you guys came through with flying colors. What you all are doing is revolutionary.

Suzanne Wagner
Fort Worth, TX

talk to us sweet, talk to us dirty. Send your letters via e-mail to letters@onourbacksmag.com; via fax to 415.648.4705; or write **On Our Backs** 3415 César Chávez, Suite 101, San Francisco, CA 94110.

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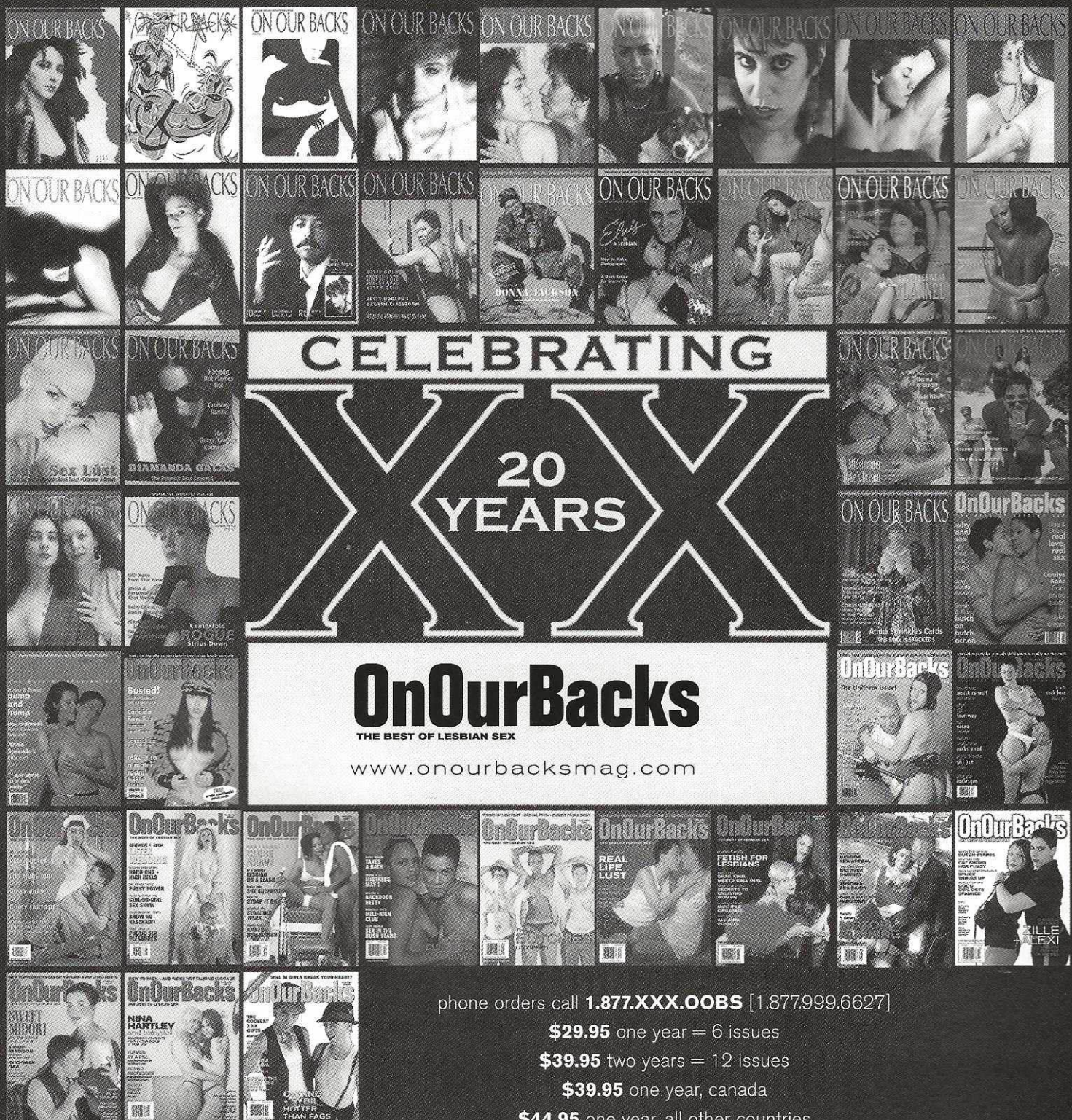

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Being Bi for *Playboy*

by Cara Bruce

illustration by Fish

When *Playboy* TV's *Sexcetera* program called me and asked if I'd star in a show on bisexual girls, I was shocked. I had no idea they even knew who I was. I had just edited a book titled *Best Bisexual Women's Erotica,* and I am bi, but I'm a writer with a full-time job and I don't really have much of a social life. I told them I thought it was a stupid idea, but the producer insisted he was serious.

In the first of many, many phone calls, the producer asked if I could get a bunch of girls (his word, not mine) together to "be bisexual."

"What exactly does that mean?" I asked him.

"You know, girls talking, laughing, kissing, making out, doing each other's nails. You know, the girl-next-door thing," he said.

Doing each other's nails? Was he fucking kidding me? The girls I know who sleep with girls don't do their nails. They cut them off! What was this guy thinking? I live in San Francisco. The girl next door is wearing leather pants, has piercings in every body part she can reach, at least one tattoo, and, this year, pink hair.

I laughed at him. But he still continued to use the phrase "girl next door." A mistake I'm sure he will never make again.

When the day came for the three-piece *Playboy* crew to arrive, the first thing they asked me to do was meet them at Union Square and take them to Fisherman's Wharf so they could have the whole "San Francisco experience." So I took them to the one neighborhood that no local ever goes to and watched the beautiful *Playboy* hostess wiggle and flaunt her tight, white tank top with a big, red bunny on it to all the German tourists. The only people who didn't notice her and guess she was in the adult industry were either blind or not into women.

Sex.com had nicely agreed to let us use their downtown offices for the shoot in return for posting their Web site on the show. They even lent us their own porn star for the segment—an Amazonian woman who had been in the business *forever*. The producer was not old enough to win much respect from this veteran fucker—and they simply did not get along, so he refused to work with her.

As it turned out he didn't want nail painting or just kissing. He wanted some straight-up fucking. He wanted girl-on-girl action. But he didn't want "obvious" lesbians. This was a big problem because all of the friends that I had asked to participate were dykes. Some of them were butch, some of them femme, all of them were beautiful.

As it turned out HE DIDN'T WANT NAIL PAINTING OR JUST KISSING. he wanted some straight-up fucking.

"I said girl-next-door, not leather-wearing, whatever," he stammered at me angrily as my friends started pouring in.

"These are the girls next door," I answered. "I'm a bisexual smut writer living in San Francisco, what the fuck do you want?"

Eventually he understood that his wording, not my interpretation, needed a little work. I hadn't planned on taking my clothes off or having sex that day. I had come with my partner who did not want to be on screen in any way, shape, or form. But after the producer nixed the porn star and the cute dykes, there weren't enough of us "girls" left to fill up the eight minutes of pure sex that he needed to shoot.

"Honey," I asked my partner, "would you mind too terribly if I made out with Lisa?"

Lisa was my best friend and co-conspirator in many writing crimes. She was in the *Best Bisexual Women's Erotica* anthology and she was fairly active in the erotic community of San Francisco. We had never made out before. Sure, there was one ecstatic night of cuddling, but that was it. My partner shrugged, not really caring. So Lisa and I changed into lacy lingerie and disappeared behind a closed door with the *Playboy* crew.

They shot us groping each other. "Slower, slower," the producer kept saying. They shot us with our clothes on, coming off, and then all the way off. They shot us kissing, licking each other's tits, having oral sex. And then they shot the hostess in the bunny tank top popping up between my legs and spouting off something stupid while Lisa continued to go down on me. And then it was over.

"You're a natural," the hostess gushed. I smiled at her. My partner later told me that my eyes were glazed over and I had a weirdly contented smile on my face. Apparently the only words to leave my mouth were, "I want to be a porn star."

I haven't seen the footage. I have no idea what they're going to do with it. All I know is that next season I'm going to be on *Playboy* TV having sex with my best friend. If nothing else, that was something.

Cara Bruce is the editor of *Best Bisexual Women's Erotica*, *Viscera*, *Best Fetish Erotica*, and the author of *The First Year—Hepatitis C*.

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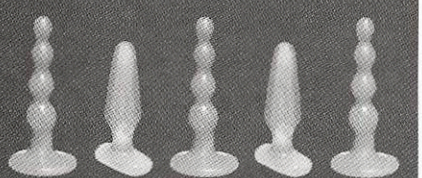
RACHEL VENNING & CLAIRE CAVANAH



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From the archives: outrageous questions revisited.

Rape Fantasy

My girlfriend has a fantasy of me handcuffing her to a fence and forcefully raping her. I have always prided myself on being a very open individual who is willing to try anything. I just don't know if I can do what she has asked.

Lucky you! You have an opportunity to tap into your own power and aggression with a consenting partner. There are lots of books on SM. Start with the ones for beginners, as they will explain some of the emotional basis for such play. If you've never thought of yourself as a "top" before, you'll be well advised to find out if you have the potential (you may find out that you don't, and that's okay). You'll also find out, in the books, more about the mind/emotions of the "bottom," i.e., your girlfriend. Coming to Power *is a classic of lesbian SM and well worth the read. Pat Califia is also an important author to check out. Don't rush here; it's new and delicate territory. The fact that your girlfriend trusted you enough to share her fantasy with you is great. Start by talking about the fantasy during the sex that you have now. Start playing with control and power in little ways. Give yourself time and permission to explore this rich sexual specialty.*

She's Porn-Obsessed

My lover has a hard time maintaining sexual interest without porn. I really want to commit to her and I want this relationship to work. What should I do?

Since you asked, you should examine your feelings about this situation: you'll need to understand what's really going on to take the best next step toward respecting (and fulfilling) your own needs and *those of your partner.*

It will be helpful to know the answers to these questions: What are your personal feelings about porn, your judgments toward and/or fear of people who use it? What are you willing to compromise in order to have a "committed" relationship? What can you not give up? Does she share your feelings of commitment? Does she even know how you feel? If not, why not? It goes on and on.

Generally, I believe that people often find dissatisfaction in their relationships in order not to deal with their own pain. Projection is easier than introspection (which is more adult and a lot scarier). When you know the answers, you will find it easier to talk to her and negotiate a more mutually satisfying relationship. Good luck!

Going Without

I'm 25 and have been sexually active for about a year. My problem is I can't come with a partner. I have no problem orgasming when I masturbate, so I know I am able to. Someone could lick and suck on me for hours and it doesn't even turn me on. Is something medically wrong with me?

No, it doesn't sound like you have a medical problem. Can you come with a partner if you masturbate? I usually have to touch myself or use a vibrator to come with or without someone. If you are unable to come in the presence of another it's most likely mental/emotional in origin. You're still new at relationships. It takes a while to feel safe with another person, which is a prerequisite for orgasm. Don't trip that oral sex doesn't get you off–go for what turns you on.

Nina Hartley is a porn star and a registered nurse. Send your woes her way. Mail: Probe Nina, 3415 César Chávez, Suite 101, San Francisco, CA 94110; fax: 415.648.4705; e-mail: nina@onourbacksmag.com.

how.to

Be A Great Lay

Improve your love-makin' skills with this collection of our best sex tips.

by Rachel Venning

In honor of **On Our Backs'** twenty-year anniversary, I revisited the best advice I've dished out over the years to cull this collection of tips and tricks. When we have really good sex it's not usually just one activity, but one activity after another, hopefully in every room of the house! So here's my advice for having the hottest sex you possibly can.

1. It Starts with You.

If you don't know what turns your crank, there's no way you'll be able to ask your partner for what pleases you, to lead them into a shared sexual adventure, or to masturbate yourself into bliss. If you aspire to be one of those older women who radiate sexual charisma, start practicing now on really tuning into your erotic self.

2. Dial "O" on the Pink Telephone.

Take your love life into your own hands. Masturbation is, as Betty Dodson says, "the love affair with yourself that lasts a lifetime." Treat yourself like you would a cherished lover–prepare for your jerk-off session by pampering yourself and creating a sensuous environment for your date. Give yourself time and space to really explore your turn-ons, don't just get yourself off the quickest way you can.

3. Breathe, Baby.

Breathing deeply and giving your blood plenty of oxygen can lead to really mind-blowing climaxes. Suck in big draws of air and really pull the energy into your genitals as you do it. Orgasm is the spasms of muscle tension releasing, but every erotic guru-type knows that there's a big woo-woo energy component, too. Building up that energy through breathing can take your sex life to a whole new level.

4. Get a Vibrator.

But how to choose the right one? The most important features are intensity, shape, and size (and maybe sound). If you come easily, you can probably forgo the powerful plug-in models and get a smaller battery-driven one. Get a curved toy to target the G spot for penetration, and choose the size according to the number of fingers you prefer. If you have a harder time coming, don't mess around with slimlines and rockets–go straight for the Magic Wand. That said, no toy chest is complete without a little vibrating bullet. They can be tucked in harnesses, pressed to the base of butt plugs, and rubbed on nipples, and they travel light.

5. Make Your Pussy-Munching the Best It Can Be.

Mix it up. If all you do is lick up and down, up and down ("fencepainting"), chances are it'll get boring to your partner after a while. Try varying movement and pressure, using your lips, breath, and teeth in addition to your tongue, changing positions, and using your hands. Get your whole creative body involved. Most women orgasm in response to rhythmic stimulation, so if you're in a groove that is building her up, don't suddenly change what you're doing. Finding the balance between variety and consistency is the art to being an oral expert.

6. Love the Ass.

Work rimming into your routine–it's easily incorporated into cunnilingus. The space between the ass and the cunt, the perineum, loves to be licked, and rimming makes a good warm-up for anal penetration. If you want to fuck your lover in the ass, rimming makes penetration easier and more pleasurable. Rimming is best done

before anal fucking, because no matter how well you shower, fucking can drag bacteria to the outside world.

7. A Hand in the Bush.

As your lover pushes her hand in, relax your cunt. To do this, try clenching and holding the PC muscles tight, then with a big sighing exhale, release that tightness; as you release and relax, your lover's hand will slide further in. Breathe deeply. Picture your vagina in your mind, seeing it open up to receive the hand of your lover.

8. Have a Strappin' Good Time.

When you strap on a dick, take a few moments of private time to really connect with it. Touch it, rub it, if you're packing enjoy the feel of it pressing against your pants. Make sure that the base of the cock is right where it feels the most solid connection to your body. Think psychic dick. Although it's not a flesh-and-blood penis, your mind can have a hard-on that's as raging as anyone's. The dildo is the physical expression of a psychic reality, and that dick can feel fantastic, rubber or not.

9. The Living End

Let this be your mantra when it come to anal sex: "Relaxation, Communication, and Lubrication." Anal sex has an undeserved reputation for being dirty and painful. In fact, that little rosebud is the doorway to worlds of pleasure. Don't force anything, but don't deny yourself either. All you need is a dollop of lube and a well-manicured index finger.

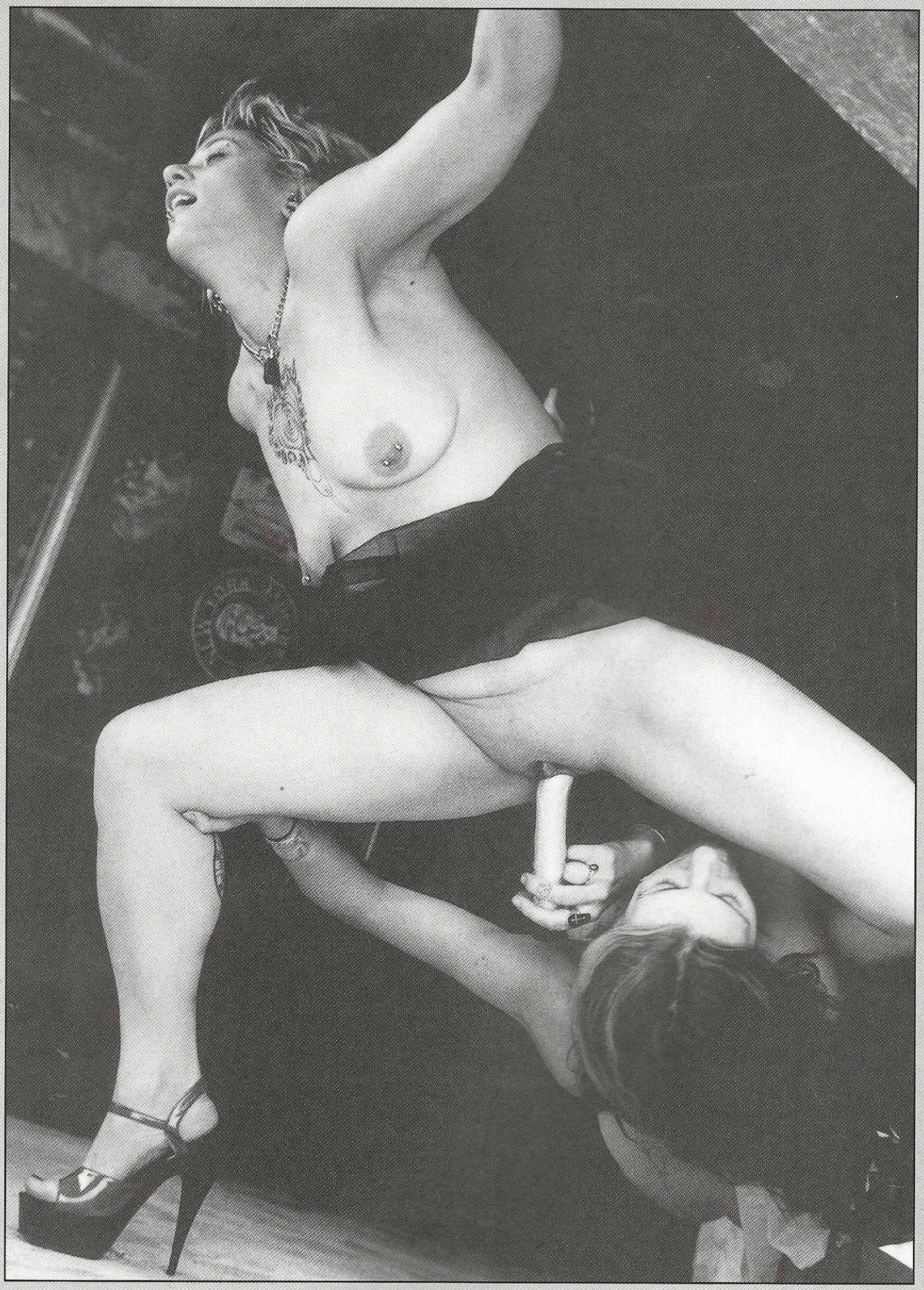
Rachel Venning is the co-author of *Sex Toys 101* and the co-founder of Toys in Babeland.

FOUR QUEER EYES

Twenty years, four photographers central to our look.

Over the years many talented queer photographers have graced the pages of this magazine. Honey Lee Cottrell and Tee Corinne first shot for **On Our Backs** in the early eighties—the two hard-working dykes and former lovers essentially invented lesbian sexual photography. Photographers Phyllis Christopher and Michele Serchuk have been shooting beautiful photos of dyke sex for years, and continue to shoot for us to this day. Here's to four radical lens-women whose art, sweat, and blood have shaped lesbian erotica.

HONEY LEE COTTRELL, Spring, 1986



MICHELE SERCHUK, Dec.Jan 2004

TEE CORINNE, Dec.Jan 2002

PHYLLIS CHRISTOPHER, Oct.Nov 2001

Books That Rocked our Beds

Eight writers and the books that turned them on.

compiled by Rachel Kramer Bussel

Books have helped shape our thinking, taught us about ourselves and our lovers, taught us how to fuck, and turned us on. Because they are such an essential component of our queer lives, we asked some queer women writers about which books definitively shaped their sexual thinking, and got quite varied responses. Hint: they're not all what you'd expect.

Spring Fire

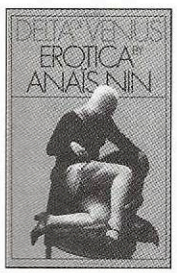
Vin Packer

The book that still moves my heart and invokes the old thrill of discovery and validation is Vin Packer's classic romance, *Spring Fire* (1952). It was the first of the great lesbian pulp paperback originals, and still one of the best. *Spring Fire* is the story of two sorority girls in a Midwestern university. One, Leda, is beautiful, confident, experienced, and sexually adventurous. The other is Mitch, young and naive, but a handsome girl full of admiration and longing for the lovely Leda. Their passion, given the puritanical constraints of the era under which Packer was obliged to work, is still hot, still intense, still wholly involving. Packer writes in a spare, straightforward style. I was electrified by *Spring Fire*. I saw myself not only in the characters, but even in the author. Taking my courage in both hands, I wrote to Vin Packer and she warmly responded. If she had ignored that letter, I'm convinced there would be no Ann Bannon today, for it was she who invited me to meet her editor, and he in turn propelled me into writing *Odd Girl Out*. And thereby hangs another tale! *Ann Bannon, author of* Beebo Brinker

Delta of Venus

Anais Nin

Anais Nin's collection of erotica, *Delta of Venus* (1977), was the first I ever read. I was living alone in New York and I searched the shelves of Womanbooks for any and all books about women and desire. Nin was such a poetic spirit, yet not ethereal at all. Her erotic writing respected the complexity of female desire in ways that no strict porn book ever could. I was reading this before I'd read her diaries and even then I could feel the deep intellectual background that gave birth to her representation of desire. This was a time when her work and her persona were often depicted as eccentric or self-indulgent by the general media. For me she postulated the possibility of female desire not devoid of intellect or politics. In fact the vessel of desire comes to a boil more thoroughly when it is constructed from all those elements—mind, body, culture, politics. That is, in fact, what brought **On Our Backs** into existence. Repression of lesbian sexuality gave us the most explicitly sexual publication ever. *Jewelle Gomez, author of* The Gilda Stories



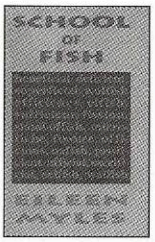
Girl Trouble

Patti Smith

School of Fish

Eileen Myles

Sweet mercy for any lusty queer nerd who reads Patti Smith's *Girl Trouble* (1972) and Eileen Myles's *Porn Poem* from *School of Fish* (1997) in one sitting. The Smith and Myles combination could just about kill a person. With inspiration. And desire. The first time I read the poems together, every molecule of me was jolted awake and ready for action. I aspired to be the sort who could make trouble for a punk like Smith. I wanted my tongue, heart, and entire body to holster the pure fierce hot transgressive brilliance Myles describes in her poem. I went in search of others who craved the same. Along the way, I found **On Our Backs.** *Felicia Luna Lemus, author of* Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties



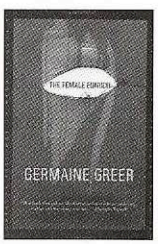
The Female Eunuch

Germaine Greer

Leatherfolk

Mark Thompson

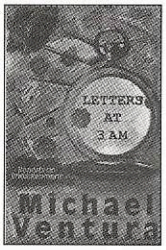
Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) changed everything for me. I was an impressionable pre-teen with feminist leanings and a high libido. Greer's statements about women demanding pleasure and her detailed discussions of female anatomy opened my eyes to a world of good sex. I also love *Leatherfolk* (1991), a collection of essays edited by Mark Thompson on the transcendent nature of leather sex. I discovered the book when I reviewed the reissue for **On Our Backs** a few years ago. It taught me about the many ways that sex could transcend gender, and the physical body. It completely expanded my sexual consciousness. *Diana Cage, editor of* On Our Backs *and author of* Box Lunch



Letters at 3 AM

Michael Ventura

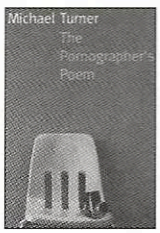
There are books like *The Well of Loneliness* and *Rubyfruit Jungle* that made me wank off in the high school bathroom simply because they were about lesbians. These books, however, did not change me in any significant way other than getting me horny. That book would be reserved for *Letters at 3 AM* (1977) by Michael Ventura–specifically two essays, one on



being an incest survivor and the other on the taboo importance of drinking whiskey alone. His raw vulnerability and original intellect taught me how to think for myself and the result of that was a definitive clarity in regards to my relationship with my own cunt. *Bett Williams, author of* Girl Walking Backwards *and* The Wrestling Party

The Pornographer's Poem

Michael Turner



Hands down (pun intended), the hottest thing I've ever read is *The Pornographer's Poem* by Michael Turner (2003). Remember when you were a teenager and everything was sexy, even the smell of your textbook in history class? This book isn't pornography, but it will bring back every nasty thing you jerked off to before you were 12. *Tennessee Jones, author of* Deliver Me from Nowhere

Pornography: Men Possessing Women

Andrea Dworkin

Noggin or nethers, which body part of mine was more stimulated by Andrea Dworkin's *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1979). Upstairs, I delighted in the intellectual irony: This tome, which Dworkin wrote to condemn pornography, excerpts so much pornography that it's impossible to read it without jerking off. Downstairs, my parts had never before been treated to such quality smut—from the Marquis de Sade to *The Story of O*—all wrapped in the guilt-defying mantle of feminist analysis. I was in lust. In the same way that the Grand Inquisitor deeply cherished the pestilence he tried to stamp out, so, I'm convinced, was Dworkin. *Heather Findlay, editor in chief of* Girlfriends

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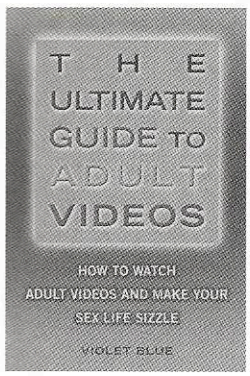

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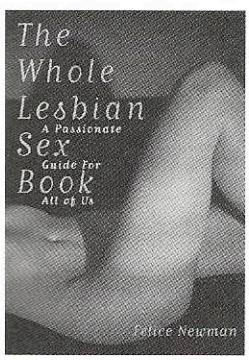

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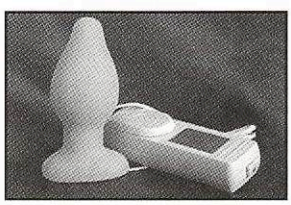


Tulip Vibrating Butt Plug

My favorite sex toy is the Tulip Vibrating Butt Plug. Sure, my Magic Wand is my most relied-upon appliance, but to lift my spirits and calm my nerves, nothing does it like the Tulip. And it's more of a special occasion-type toy. Surprisingly soft pink cyberskin makes the golf ball-size plug easier to slide in, and the texture and shape combine to keep it from popping out. It feels sublime—like floating on a huge puffy cloud on a sunny day, but if I'd rather blast off than cruise a butt plug high, the tiny but mighty vibrator targets the stratosphere. *Rachel Venning, cofounder of Toys in Babeland*

Silicone Dildo

My favorite sex invention over the past two decades? The silicone dildo, of course. No more the ugly hard plastic dong of yesteryear, our silicone cocks are all about heat and pleasure served up with the dignity and beauty we deserve. *Felice Newman, author of* The Whole Lesbian Sex Book

Rocket Ass Plug

I bought this medium-size plug a few years ago and the look on more than one lover's face has been like floodlights coming on in a stadium. Call it illuminating. *Tennessee Jones, author of* Deliver Me from Nowhere

The Hitachi

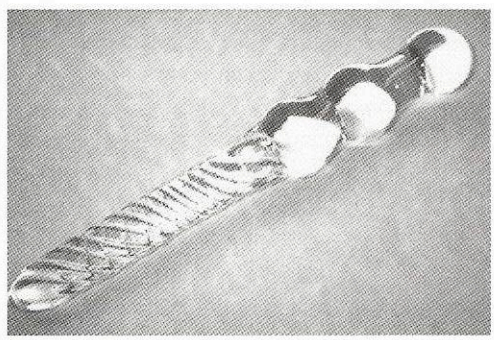
My Hitachi Magic Wand, with an extension cord. *Nina Hartley, porn star*

The Internet

E-mail, online chatting, electronic dating services–all of this leads to real human beings and real fucking. I love to compose fantasies to lovers, to tease them this way, and when they respond, it is such a turn-on to be courted with fuck words. Electronic love/lust works for me because it is real and immediate. It gets my mind going and once my mind is engaged, my body follows. It sets the stage. I only play like this if I have a real goal in mind, a real person I want or that I'm responding to. I don't just want to entertain the idea of sex–I want it to lead to real sex. *tatianna de la tierra, author of* For the Hard Ones/Para Las Duras

The Feeldoe

Good double-dildos. The Feeldoe by Tantus is revolutionary in terms of lesbian sex. But it should come in colors other than purple–because it's not always good with the scene you're planning. Unless you're purple, too. And of course, hand-in-glove with dildos are really good harnesses. Good lube is another great invention–Liquid Silk, which I think is fabulous, and warming lubes like K-Y Warming Liquid work very well. Without them, we would not be as satisfied or adventuresome. If things hurt, you don't want to do them. *Victoria Brownworth, author of* Too Queer: Essays from a Radical Life



Glass Dildos

I am in love with glass dildos. They are rock hard and frictionless. They allow me to fuck and be fucked all night long, they can be cooled or heated, and they are dishwasher safe. It thrills me to clean my dick next to my dinnerware. *Heather Petrocelli, circulation director of* On Our Backs.

The Silver Bullet

Versatile and affordable, The Silver Bullet Vibrator is my shiny, pretty pal. It's so sneaky and wee; it must be up to something. *Laurie Koh, editorial assistant of* Girlfriends

Wahl Coil-Operated Vibrator

My first experience with the Wahl coil-operated vibrator changed my life. I thought that vibrators were for people who had a hard time getting off. My ex-girlfriend had one that looked like a mini-hairdryer, and not my idea of sexy at all. But when she put it against my clit, I came in about ten seconds. It made me realize there were lots of ways to come. *Mignon Freeman, assistant editor of* Girlfriends

The iVibe

The Pocket Rocket made my orgasms more portable. I bought a pink iVibe to match my raspberry iMac. It's so damn cute, I want to jerk off at work. Also, I'm competely in love with the Severin, Tantus Silicone's new butt plug. *Diana Cage, editor of* On Our Backs

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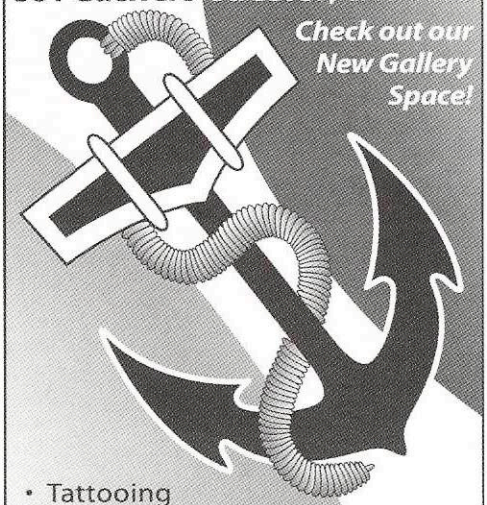

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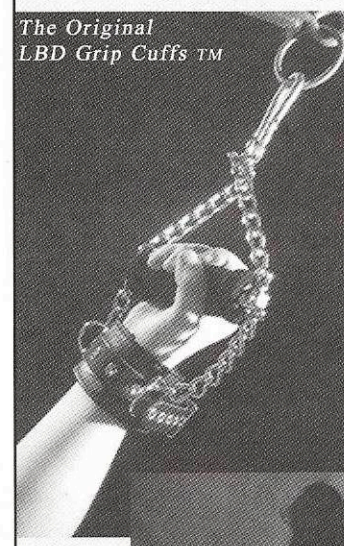

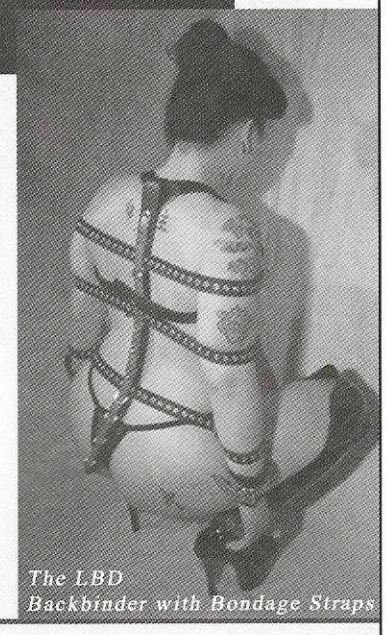

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Sex, Time, and Videotape

Twenty years of lesbian sex, caught on camera.

by Lori Selke

Although lesbians made erotic films back in the seventies, dyke porn didn't really take off until the 1980s, when Fatale Video, **On Our Backs**' original sister company, launched. It didn't take long for other women–and a few mainstream producers–to make their mark on tape. Here are ten of the best lesbian porn videos ever made, in alphabetical order:

1. Bittersweet (House O' Chicks)

A 20-minute vignette, this video chronicles an SM scene between a professional dominatrix and her punky lover.

One scene, no dialogue, and the most sensual piercing ever caught on video, shot in flattering candlelight. It's the first genuine lesbian SM porn, and still the best. Unfortunately, it's out of print.

2. Gallery Erotica (Passion Fruit)

Austin-based Passion Fruit is the new dyke video kid on the block, and *Gallery Erotica* is their tour de force. A clever conceit–the film gives you a peek behind the scenes of the photos in an erotic art gallery–frames a collection of hot, fetish-flavored vignettes. Don't be fooled by the soft title. This video manages playfulness without cheese–a combination rapidly becoming Passion Fruit's trademark.

3. Ladies of the Night (Bleu Productions)

Simply the hottest lesbian vampire scenario ever. Filmmaker Maria Beatty started out making experimental films like *The Black Glove,* but soon turned her hand to out-and-out porn. Her arty background shows in this film's aesthetic, modeled explicitly after old silent reels: high-contrast black-and-white film, a soundtrack without dialogue, dramatic makeup, and costumes.

The plot? A young schoolgirl is kidnapped by two sexy, fetishy vampires and voluptuously tortured in the basement of their mansion.

4. No Man's Land: Legends (Video Team)

The porn stars of the seventies and eighties are legendary. This video is directed by one of those legends herself, Bionca Seven, and stars some of the best and brightest of the first video age of porn, among them Nina Hartley, Jeanna Fine, Asia Carrera, Porsche Lynn, Sharon Kane, Teri Weigel, and Amber Lynn. They gather in a big house, and pair off to while away the time until the ten-girl orgy finale.

5. San Francisco Lesbians 6 (Pleasure Productions)

It's hard to believe that this series is distributed as mainstream porn, but it is–by a company out of New Jersey, no less. Many of the volumes in this long-running series are worth checking out; it's hard to pick a favorite. They all feature real dykes engaging in creative, kinky play. But this installment, directed by J. Jones, has become a cult classic. The butch-femme dynamic is forefront–and made abundantly clear by the hot butch trio on the cover.

6. Suburban Dykes (Fatale Video)

Even to this day, most of the best lesbian porn is made by amateurs. So when Debi Sundahl of Fatale Video hired Nina Hartley and Sharon Mitchell to co-star in this movie, it was a breakthrough. This was, in fact, the first full-fledged, feature-length lesbian porno with a plot. A suburban dyke couple decides to experiment with phone sex, then hires a butch escort (Mitchell) to spice up their love life. And the professional performers mean there's a self-assurance to the sex.

7. Sugar High, Glitter City (SIR Video)

This video has it all: hot sex, cool music, a retro seventies vibe wedded to a funky sci-fi premise, and even a coherent plot. Sugar is the drug of the future; sugar pimps and candy ho's rule the gritty urban streets. Jackie Strano is a corrupt cop who shakes down the girls for sex and Pixie Stix; Shar Rednour is a born-again preacher, reformed ho–and Strano's ex-lover. It all culminates in a wild threesome. The flat-out glam of this flick makes it unique.

8. Voluptuous Vixens (Sexpositive Productions)

All-femme porn is hard to pull off without compromising the dyke gaze. This video succeeds handily, but that's not what's great about it. It's the girls who make this such a treat: a bevy of luscious, curvy, fat femmes, all dolled up in their pin-up best. With animal prints, big cars, and even an erotic catfight, "lush" is the only word that describes this video.

9. Well Sexy Women (Pride Video)

The first safer sex tape for women, this British video aspired to be both informative and hot–and succeeded in both. In some ways, it paved the way for instructional features like Tristan Taormino's pansexual *Ultimate Guide to Anal Sex for Women*. It just goes to prove how important it is to "show, don't tell"–and it's hard not to walk away from this movie without acquiring at least a mild fetish for latex gloves.

10. Women Seeking Women 3 (Girlfriends Films)

This relatively new set of tapes is really the only authentic femme-on-femme series available. The action almost always includes sex toys, but also features tongues and tribadism (and how often do we get to see that?). This volume makes the grade because of its final scene, in which a real-life tough biker chick straps one on for her partner.

Lori Selke is the editor of *Tough Girls*.

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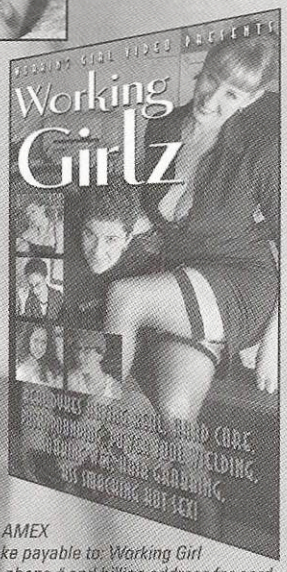

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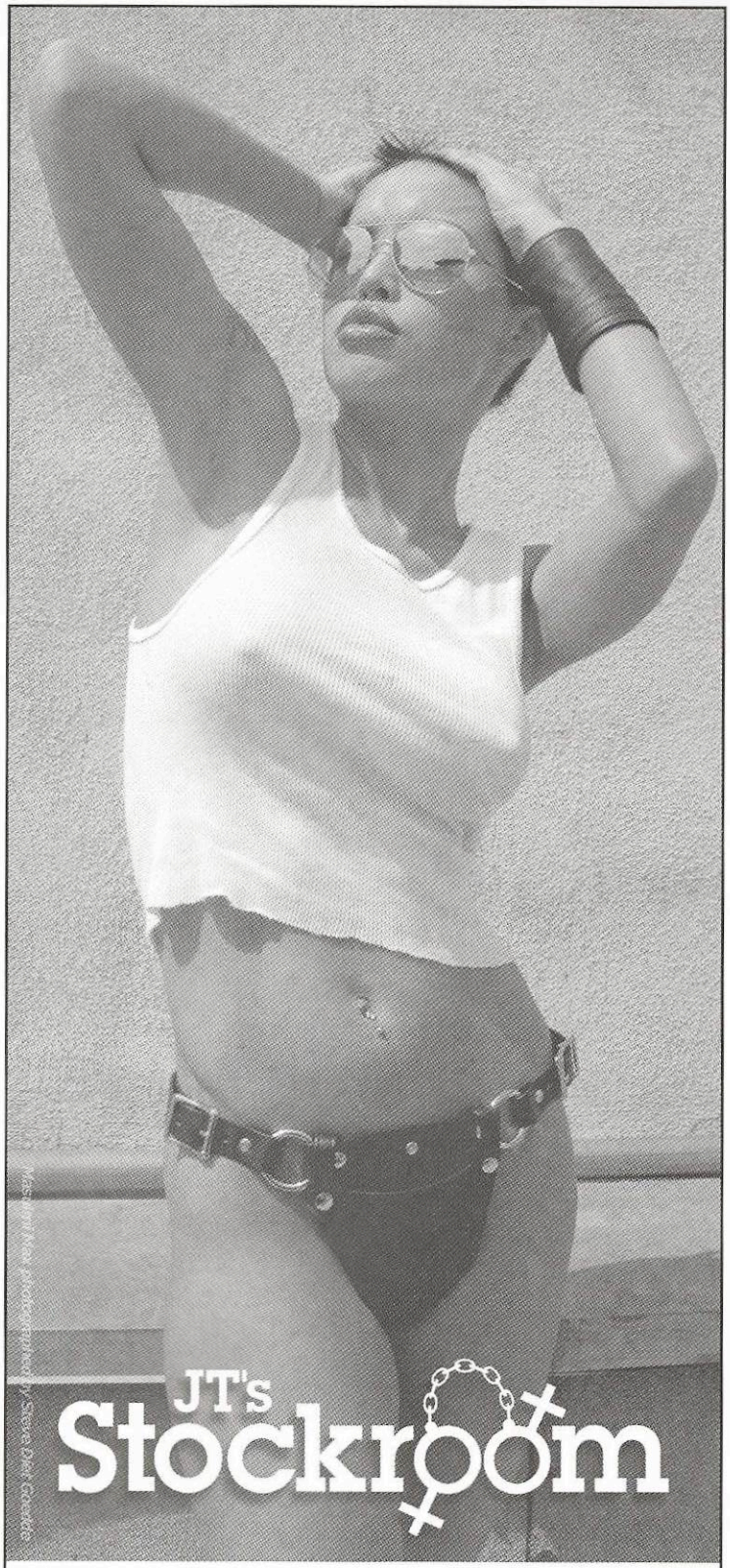

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feature

opening PANDORA'S box

When Debi Sundahl and Nan Kinney founded **On Our Backs** twenty years ago, they helped start a whole sex-positive movement.

by CHRISTI CASSIDY

Clockwise from top left: Nan Kinney, Debi Sundahl, and the first issue of On Our Backs.

It was 30 degrees below zero with nasty winds blowing and four-foot drifts of snow around the cabin where Nan Kinney and Debi Sundahl were living in the winter of 1982. They had a wood stove for heat. Lovers of three years, they had come to the icy climes of northern Minnesota to explore their spirituality, and ended up discovering their sexuality—and aspects of it much deeper and more obscure than just their desire for women. What they learned, and what happened next, would (in Deb's words) "turn the lesbian nation on its ear."

In the midst of the virulent anti-sex, anti-porn atmosphere of the lesbian community at the time, Nan and Debi were desperate for images of women together. Real lesbians. Having real sex. And where were images of the butch-femme couples who echoed their own relationship? They had experimented with SM but found no pictures of women engaged in power play, either.

So they hatched a plan. They would move to San Francisco, where Samois (a lesbian SM group) was located. "The only books we could find in Minneapolis were *Coming to Power* by the Samois Collective and *Sapphistry* by [Samois member] Pat Califia," Deb recalls. Clearly, a pilgrimage to Babylon by the Bay was their destiny.

San Francisco was and still is one of the most tolerant cities in the U.S., so they packed their bags and drove west in a drive-away Park Avenue Buick stuffed to the gills with suitcases they hauled onto the train after dropping the car off in tiny Walnut Creek.

"Everybody went to the Samois meetings, everybody who was at all interested in sex. The butch-femme couples too, not just leather," Nan says. They immediately became friends with Pat Califia and Gayle Rubin and started helping with the Samois newsletter.

"There was no defining moment," Deb says. "**On Our Backs** was evolutionary, grown organically. We were working for Samois and knew we wanted to have our own business. We wanted to build something."

"We were mad that the politically correct dykes were controlling the lesbian media," Nan says.

"It was flannel shirts and jeans, all very asexual," Deb puts in. "Butch-femme had a history—we had read Joan Nestle's article about the history of 1950s butch-femme—and we wanted to show that. We were lesbians and we liked sex. It was a lesbian sex magazine. We put the word *lesbian* right on the cover of the first issue."

"But we knew from Samois it was a political statement to make a magazine," Nan says. "We were in the right time and place, and we were the right age to just do it."

After Samois went defunct, Nan and Deb set up shop in a flat in the Mission District with Myrna Elana, a friend from Samois who would edit the first issue of what became **On Our Backs**, "entertainment for the adventurous lesbian."

It was a struggle. Tireless networking and working to save money for the first issue led them to stage two lesbian-only strip shows at a club called the Baybrick Inn to finance the first issue. The Tuesday night strip shows, called "BurLEZK," continued for three years. Meanwhile, Debi continued working as a stripper first at the Lusty Lady and then at the Mitchell Brothers, where she met Nina Hartley ("long before she was a famous porn star!" Deb laughs). Nan ploughed a jackhammer day after day on the streets of San Francisco for PG&E.

But by June 1984 their dream had become a reality. With a print run of 2,000, they sold the first issue of **On Our Backs** at the Gay Pride fair and made enough money to pay the printer. "And without the Mac and desktop publishing, we never would have been able to put out another issue of the magazine," Nan adds.

Susie Bright, **On Our Backs**' well-known and canny editor from 1984 until 1991, contributed to that groundbreaking first issue, and became editor beginning with the second issue. At the time the only employee of Good Vibrations, Bright wrote the personal advice column "Toys for Us," which morphed into her popular Q&A and became the basis for *Susie Sexpert's Lesbian Sex World*.

SUNDAHL AND KINNEY: PHYLLIS CHRISTOPHER

"'Lesbian sex! Right here,'" says Deborah. "We were calling it out from the booth at Gay Pride twenty years ago."

Nan and Deb sold 500 copies at Gay Pride. They lugged 1,500 copies back to the flat and wondered how they were going to sell them. "We inherited the Samois list, and we got a list of all the feminist bookstores," says Deb. But they soon ran into anti-pornography policies among the booksellers. "Only five percent took it. Oscar Wilde in New York, the gay men's leather stores took it, but Amazon in Minneapolis? No, they were one of the last holdouts." It wasn't until the magazine started selling back issues over the next years that they sold the remaining 1,000 copies of that first issue. By 1989, a full 95 percent of all the feminist and gay bookstores carried the magazine.

Just this year, a "very good" copy of that first issue of **On Our Backs** sold on eBay for $80.00.

At the time, reactions were intense and polarized. "A magazine for adventurous lesbians is just what we need. I enjoyed the stories so much it prompted me to take hand to clit and relieve the tension," wrote one reader from Philadelphia. But a Washington, D.C., reader disagreed: "For years we as lesbian-feminists have been fighting male pornography...It shocks and abhors me to find that women have stooped to the same methods of selling." Overall, though, the response was positive, as in this response from a reader in Pacific Grove, CA: "Just what I've been waiting for! Thought I was the only dyke in the whole world who loves erotica!"

The writer Jewelle Gomez says now, "*On Our Backs* was just what lesbian feminism needed and at just the right time.Lesbian feminists still need sex to keep us from being too self-righteous and too dry—figuratively and literally!"

Blatantly flaunting its sense of humor, a trait sorely lacking in many feminist publications of the time, **On Our Backs**' name itself, coined by Gayle Rubin, was a lampoon of the fiercely anti-porn feminist newspaper *off our backs*. As Maria Elena Buszek wrote in *Of Varga Girls and Riot Grrls: The Varga Girl and WWII in the Pin-up's Feminist History*, "With contributing writers such as Susie Bright and Joan Nestle, and photographers like Tee Corinne and Honey Lee Cottrell, **On Our Backs** hilariously subverted *Playboy*'s concept of a 'pleasure primer for masculine tastes' to live up to its slogan, 'Entertainment for the adventurous lesbian.'" Also contributing to the first few issues were Gomez, Bright, Jill Posner, Califia, Morgan Gwenwald, Dorothy Allison, Lee Lynch, Phyllis Christopher, and Linda Smukler. To any student of lesbian culture, these names still resonate.

In addition, **On Our Backs** paid its contributors, which even the more open literary magazines could not always do. "Nobody else paid, but we always did," says Deborah, who now runs Isis Media, which produces erotic and educational material on female ejaculation. "We might have been late sometimes, but lesbians' work was valuable, and we wanted to acknowledge that."

Eventually they were able to pay a full staff, including health insurance, and support themselves, with help from the lucrative videos they were making under the name Fatale Video, the magazine, and a mail-order business they'd set up to sell dildos, sex toys, and other goodies that would appeal to their readers. (Full disclosure: I work with Nan on Fatale Media, and Nan is my lover.)

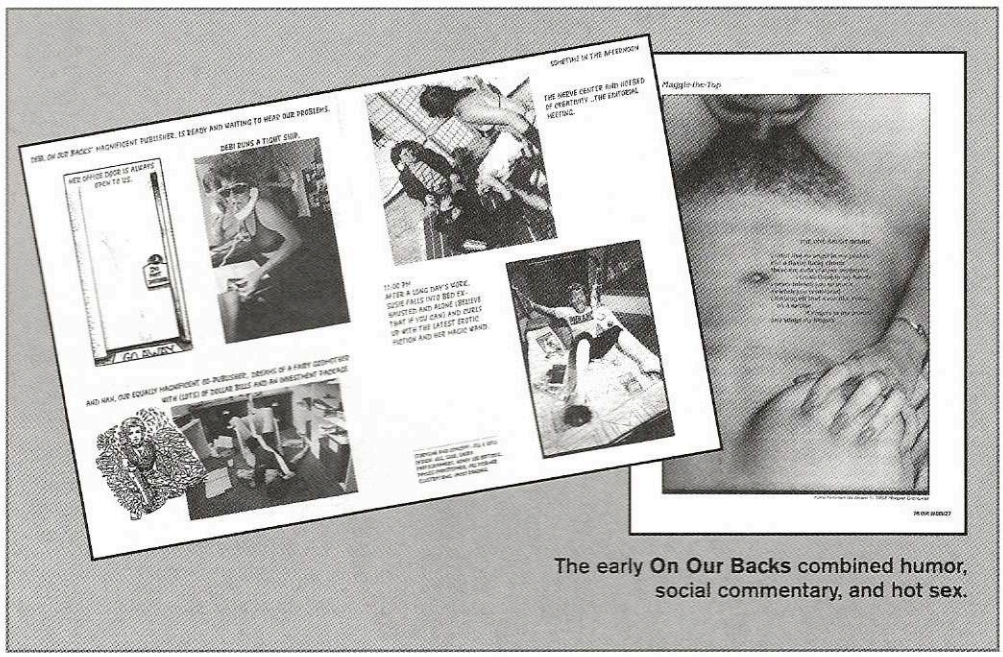
There were rocky times, but ultimately, Nan says, "We really had the staying power because of the people behind it," including Bright, Posner, Christopher, editors Shar Rednour and Marcy Sheiner, and art director Robin Simmons.

"At meetings we'd ask ourselves, how's it look, is it still forward-reaching enough, creative enough? Are we still pushing the envelope, are we using all our creative juices enough to make something cool?" Deb adds after a moment, "It was classy, not sleazy."

"I feel happy, blessed really, to have met all the people I met through **On Our Backs**. This whole crowd of wild, radical lesbians, this whole group of daring women willing to put themselves out there," Nan says without hesitation. "If I hadn't done *On Our Backs,* I wouldn't have had this level of comfort in my own sexuality."

"Your butch identity was totally validated," Deb interjects. "Nan was the first woman in San Francisco to wear a suit—a real suit and tie—every week to the strip club. Femmes, it'd make 'em wet. Butches got with the program when they saw how excited their femmes were!"

"That's what I mean. I thought, 'Oh, phew, there are other women like me.' The whole panorama of how women can be sexual... I didn't realize what a huge Pandora's box we were opening."



The early On Our Backs combined humor, social commentary, and hot sex.

Christi Cassidy is a writer, book editor, and freelance publicist. You can reach her at cccassidy@aol.com.

working GIRL

SUSIE BRIGHT remembers the hardworking dykes who invented lesbian porn

Susie Sexpert first put out for On Our Backs.

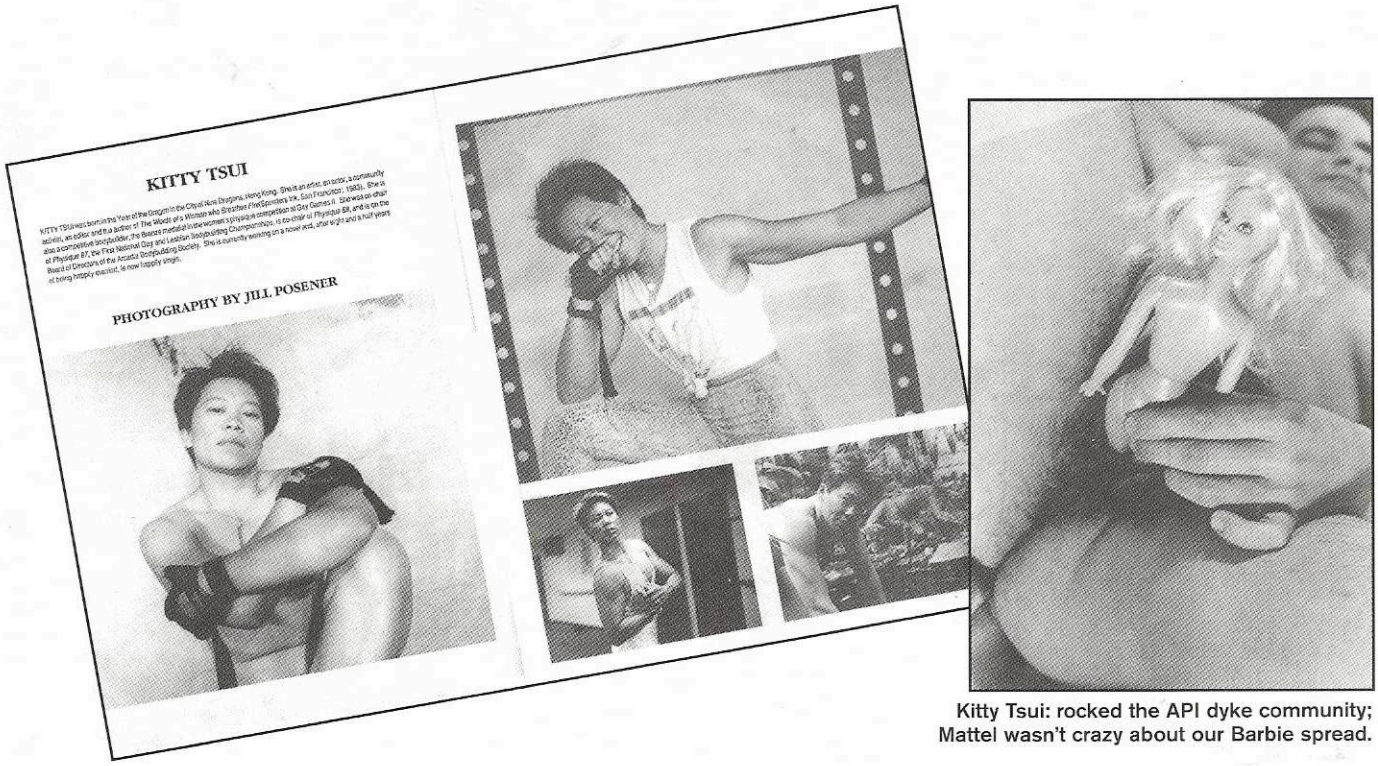
I moved to San Francisco in 1980, and lived the life of a femme diva starlet in an anarchist commune in the barrio. In other words, typical city living. One night, I read a poem that compared fisting my girlfriend to quantum physics at Modern Times bookstore in their new queer poets series. *Queer* was a subversive word at that time.

When I finished reading, a blonde chick with a pageboy slipped me a personal letter that said she loved my poetry. She invited me to be a part of the first issue of **On Our Backs** magazine, "entertainment for the adventurous lesbian." If anyone has ever been seduced by the mere title of a promise, that was me. I had been a voracious teen reader of *off our backs*, the feminist newsweekly, and it had broken my heart when their staff turned so viciously against sexual liberation. This new magazine offered the perfect antidote.

That blonde with the blunt cut falling over her eyes was Myrna Elana, **On Our Backs** cofounder. Her partner-in-crime was Debi Sundahl. They worked in the peep shows and strip clubs of the Tenderloin district, and shared a Victorian in Haight Ashbury with Debi's lover, Nan Kinney. In the beginning, I was just a contributor waiting for the bells to go off. But after several months of silence, I sought out these mysterious **On Our Backs** girls. When I found them, I told them I had been part of a high school underground newspaper, I could perform any shit work connected with getting a magazine out, and that I wanted to help. I could see they were overwhelmed. The main problem was—you guessed it—money. They asked me to be the "Advertising Director," which if you knew my communist past was a real laugh. But I worked at Good Vibrations at the time. In fact, I was the only employee at Good Vibrations. I earnestly called all the vendors I did business with and asked them to take out little $25 and $50 ads in our debut issue. Hey, buy the whole page for $100!

I remember our two big advertisers were Last Gasp Comix and The Mitchell Brothers, owners of a famous sex club called the Mitchell Brothers O'Farrell Theater. Ron Turner, Last Gasp's founder, told me it was a "fine lesbian humor magazine" and just handed me cash. Debi, as well as many of our first models, worked in the Mitchell Brothers' sex club or starred in their movies. Kathy Andrew, founder of Stormy Leather, the first woman to tailor

JILL POSNER



Kitty Tsui: rocked the API dyke community; Mattel wasn't crazy about our Barbie spread.

leatherwear for women, was another one of our first advertisers. Kathy had an antique sewing machine that she operated like a crazed elf in a leaking basement on Sanchez Street. Gosnell Duncan, who invented the silicone dildo, paid us to do a crazy beach/mermaid photo shoot with his "products." It was the first national advertising for dildos, and every issue he let us do another "campaign," culminating in our Mapplethorpe-esque Perfect Moment where we modeled his favorite item, "The Susie," with a calla lily and a beautiful round mirror.

> It was as if you had to be A CAREER WHORE, a dedicated outcast, to show your face in a lesbian magazine... LET ALONE YOUR PUSSY.

My lover, Honey Lee Cottrell, shot most of our photography for the first issues, including those ads for Gosnell. When I think back, she might have worked harder than any of us. The photo shoots were so hard to arrange, and then there was endless printing in the Harvey Milk public photo labs. She and her ex-lover, Tee Corinne, had literally invented lesbian erotic photography in the 1970s. Morgan Gwenwald in New York was another pioneer. Look at the first lesbian sex books, *Sapphistry* by Tee Corinne and Pat Califia, and *Coming to Power* by the Samois Collective, and there you'll find the first lesbians opening their bodies and their sexuality. It was no coincidence that the SM, punk-era women were the first to show their faces to the public—they were the first to have the nerve. It was as if you had to be a career whore, a dedicated outcast, to show your face in a lesbian magazine...let alone your pussy.

When **On Our Backs** debuted, some readers complained that they wanted to see vanilla, "bank teller" type babes in the pictures. We replied, "Well, come on down and let us shoot you! The punk strippers didn't want to put on bank teller outfits, they wanted to express themselves. Many of the early models changed the way lesbians think about themselves: Terri and Caerage were the most beautiful punk/butch-femme couple ever. Rachel and Elexis turned the black lesbian community upside down. Kitty Tsui did the same in Asian/Pacific Islander dyke culture. Pepper and Rock 'n' Roll Ramona were the darlings of the first lesbian burlesque–the girls would drown them in flowers and shots. Cassie and Raven, both now deceased (breast cancer and suicide, respectively), were the sexiest women I ever laid eyes on. They started the first women's escort service and without a doubt could make any woman's dream come true between the two of them. I haven't seen such sexual charisma since. I'm not kidding about the revolutionary effect they had on strangers' lives. One woman told me she took one look at the **On Our Backs** cover of Rachel and Elexis, packed her bags in Minnesota that evening, and moved to California.

Expressing yourself was what it was all about. I look back on that first year and just sigh at all that talent, and the rage that had pent it all up. Dorothy Allison, Joan Nestle, Pat Califia, Sarah Schulman, Sapphire, myself–we couldn't be published in the lesbian presses because of our politics and sexuality, and we couldn't be published in the mainstream world because of its overt homophobia and misogyny. These were some of the best American writers of their generation.

On a more practical level, I would easily claim that **On Our Backs** created the first mainstream acceptance of "women's erotica," the practical steps to finding one's G spot, and having a free 'n' easy attitude toward dildos and vibrators. We taught the world how to use a strap-on. We made sex fun and smart for women, something that was entirely female self-interest. **On Our Backs** went way beyond homosexuality. It was really feminist sex liberation.

Susie Bright is the editor of *Best American Erotica*, and the author of several books, most recently *Mommy's Little Girl*.

Girls Gone Wild

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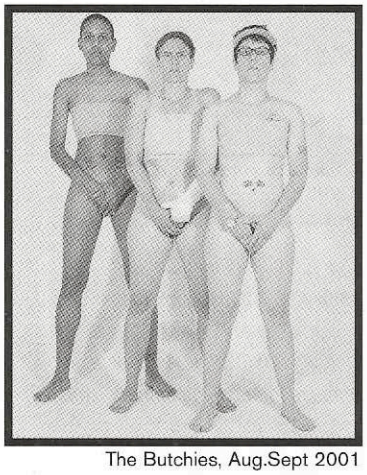


The Butchies, Aug.Sept 2001

Nikki + Andrea, April.May 1999

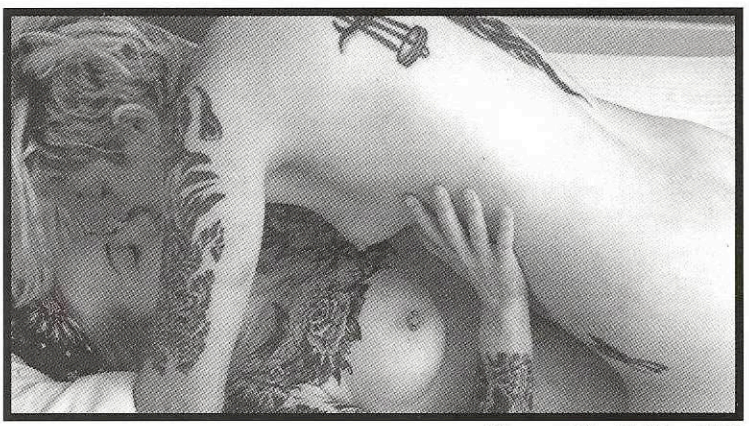
Angel, Aug.Sept 2003

Siobhan + J.J., Feb.Mar 2001

Alexi, Feb.Mar 2000

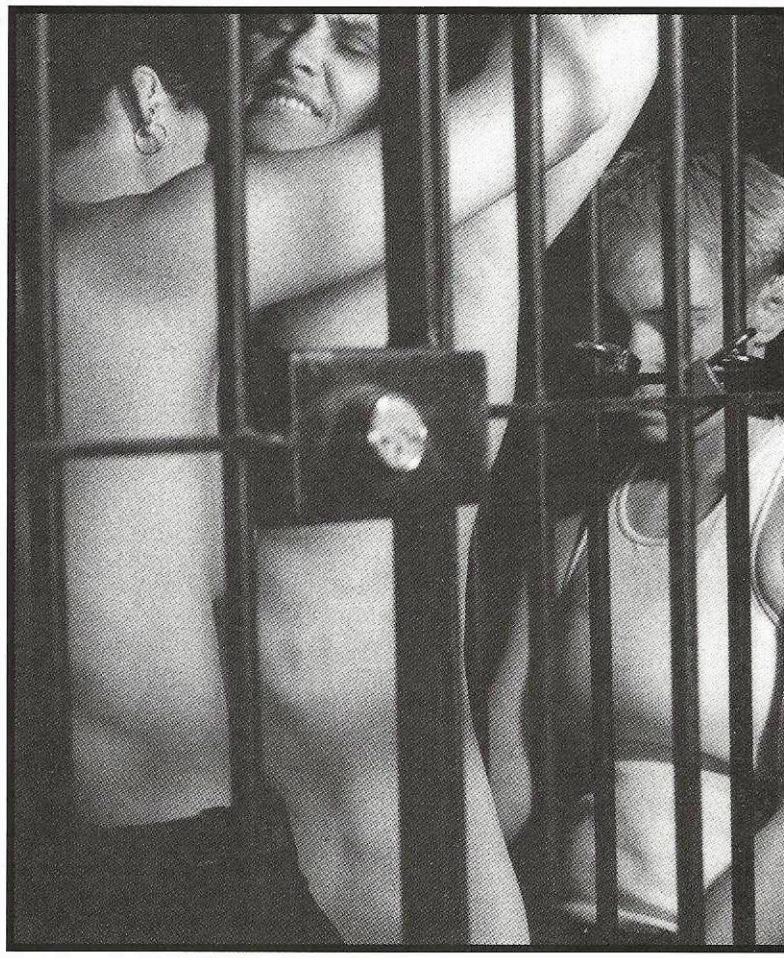
Heather + Antonia, June.July 1998

Kiki + Santa, Dec.Jan 1999

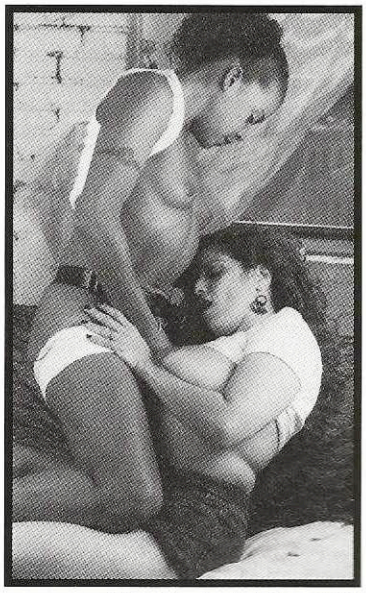


Bianca + Mila, Oct.Nov 2002

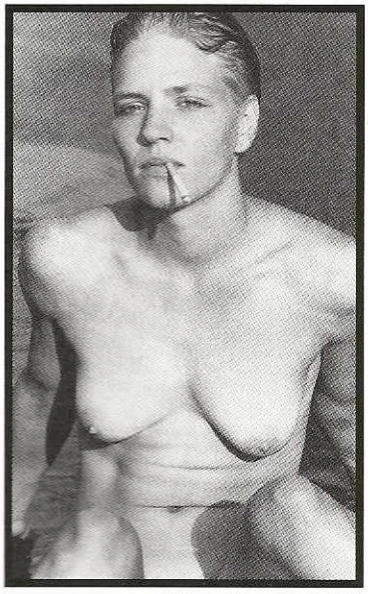
Sasha, Oct.Nov 2003



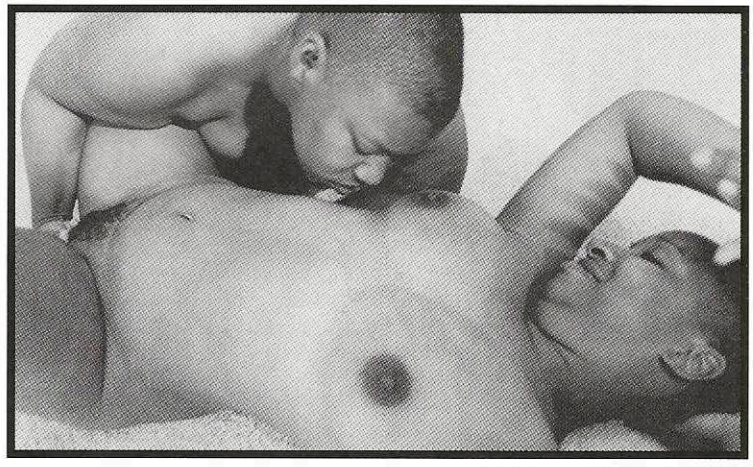
Toni, Jess, + Seven, Aug.Sept 1999



Evita + Leslie, Feb.Mar 2000

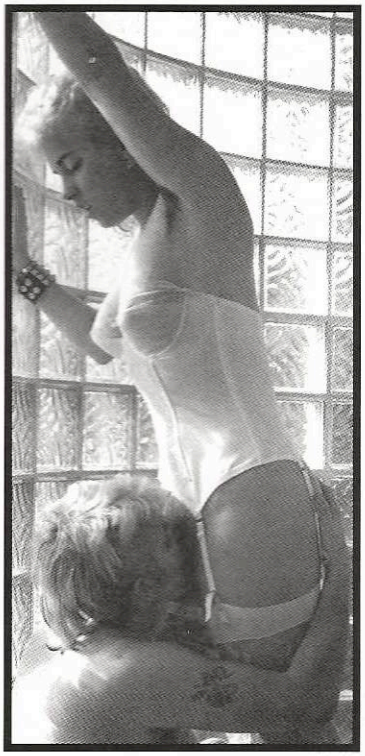


Dawn, June.July 1998

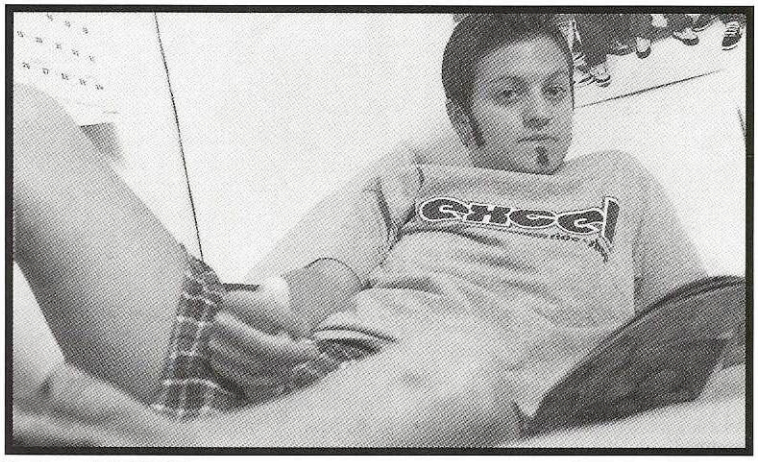


Sonya + Stacy, June.July 2002

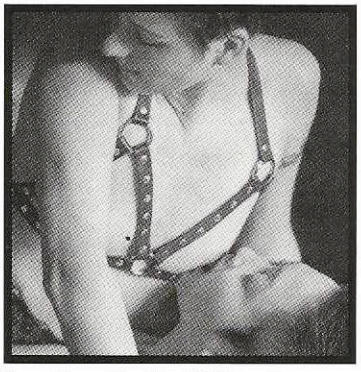
Liz, Feb.Mar 2004



Kimo + Jill, Summer 1988



Chris, June.July 2003

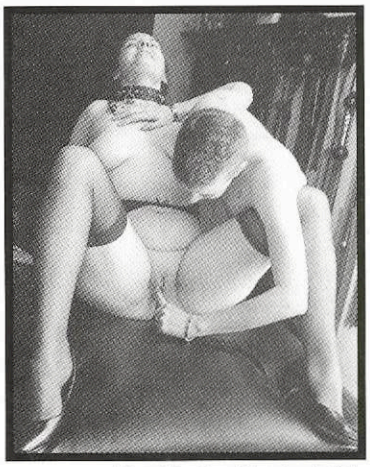


Tan + Anna, Dec.Jan 2000

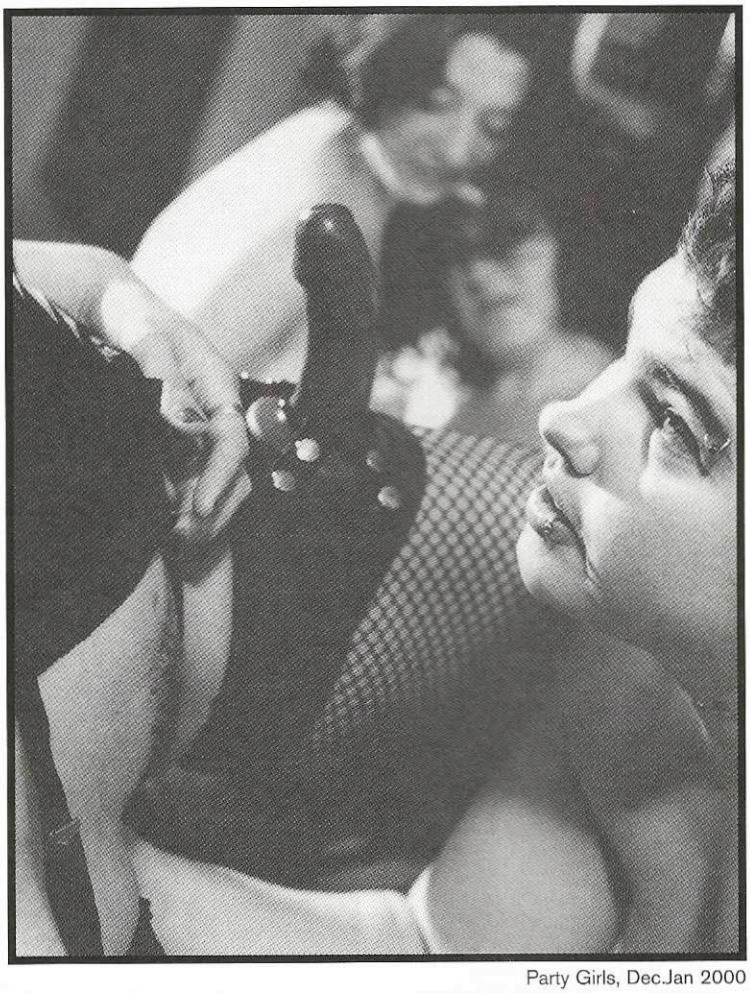
Tristan + Teresa, Dec.Jan 1999

Ellen, Paula, + Abbie, April.May 2003

Ezzy + Sandra, April.May 2001

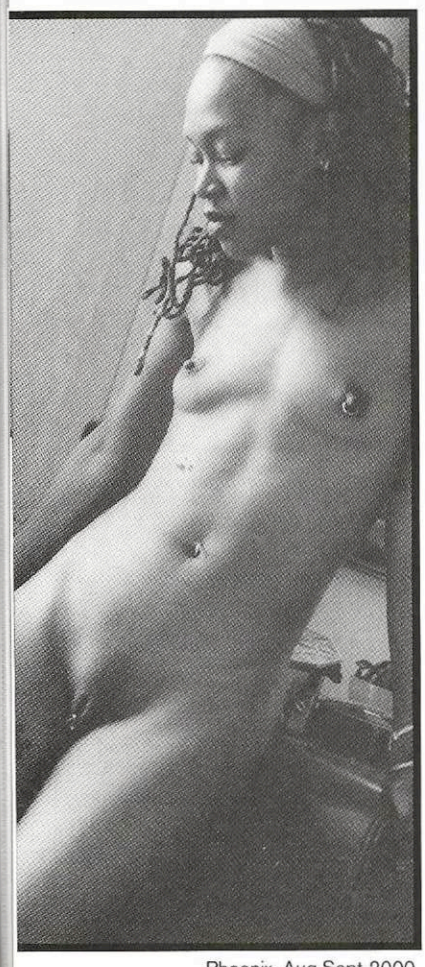


J.P. + Heather, Dec.Jan 2001



Party Girls, Dec.Jan 2000

Marilyn + Sky, Oct.Nov 1999

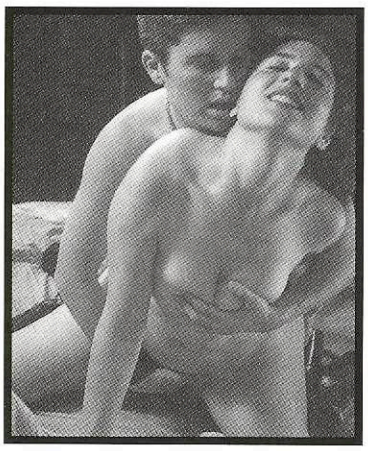


Phoenix, Aug.Sept 2000

Tamara + Clyde, Dec.Jan 2003

Eden, Dec.Jan 2001

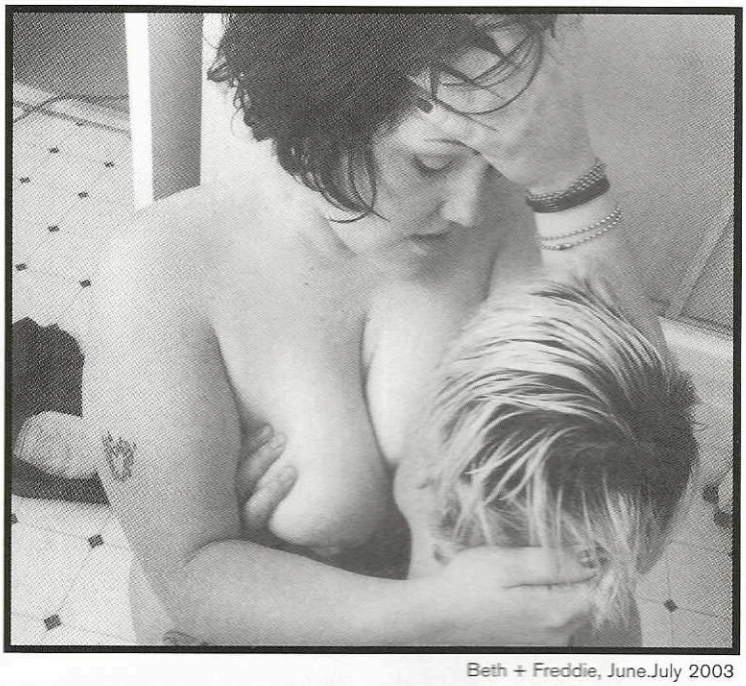
Simone + Madeline, May.June 1991



Brett + Heidi, Oct.Nov 2003

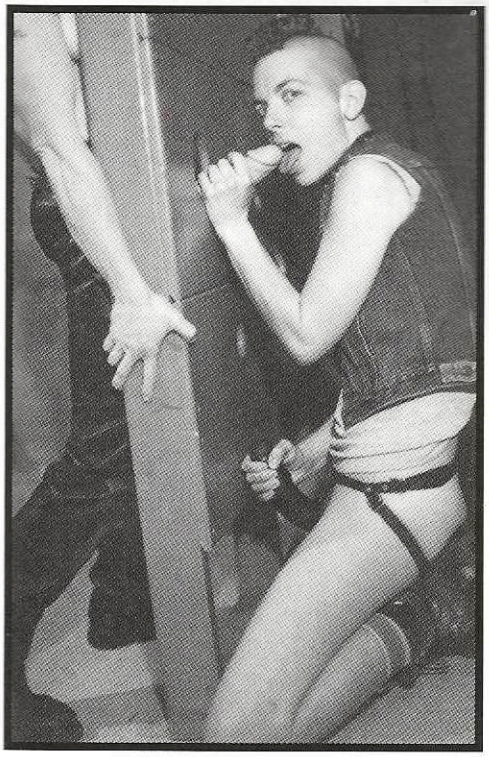
Heather + Tina, April.May 2004

Angel, Oct.Nov 2001



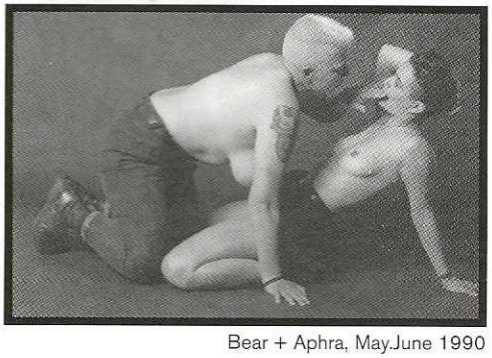
Beth + Freddie, June.July 2003

Grover + Glow, Oct.Nov 2002

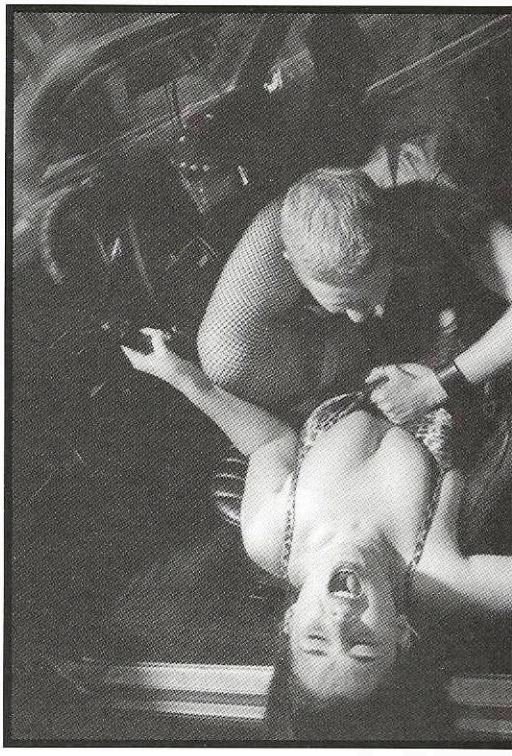


Red + Egidio, Feb.Mar 2001

Bleau, Feb.Mar 2003

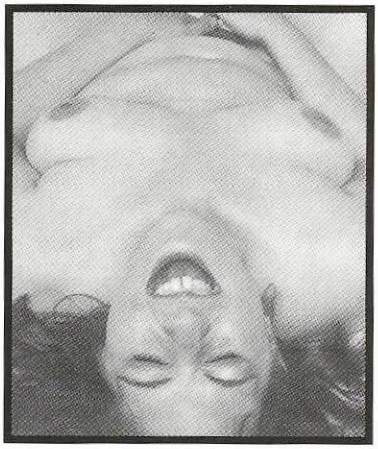


Bear + Aphra, May.June 1990

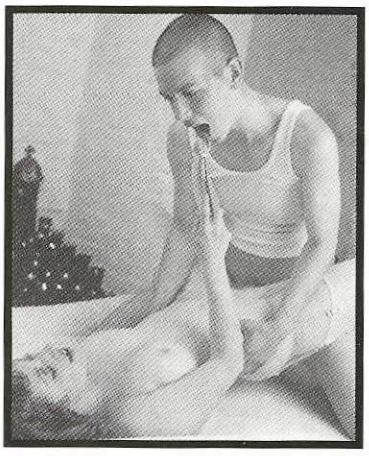


Emily + Dean, Aug.Sept 2002

Starri + Leila, Feb.Mar 2004

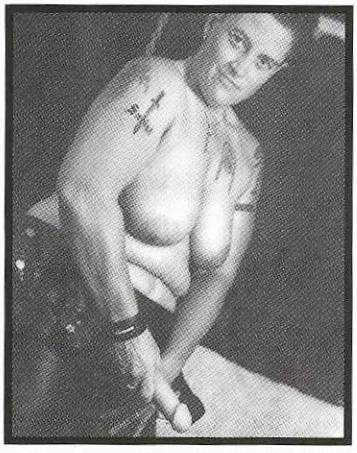


Quinn, April.May 2004

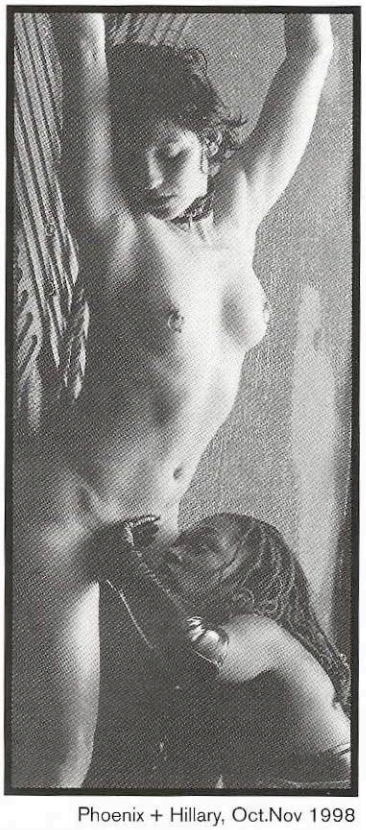


Genevieve + Adam, Aug.Sept 2000

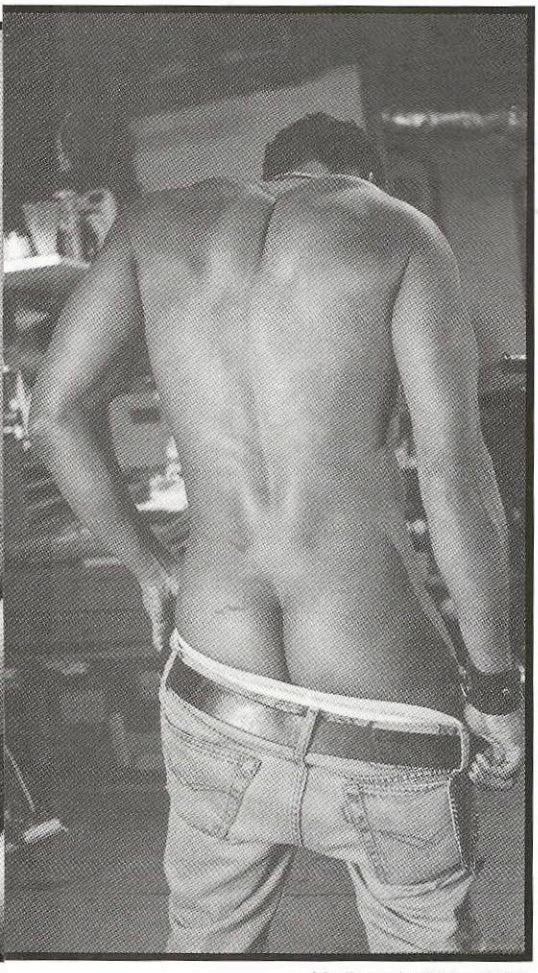
Meredith, Oct.Nov 2000



Shotgun, Oct.Nov 2002

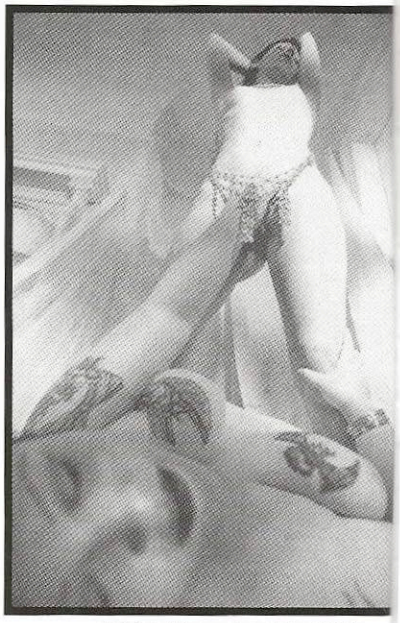


Phoenix + Hillary, Oct.Nov 1998

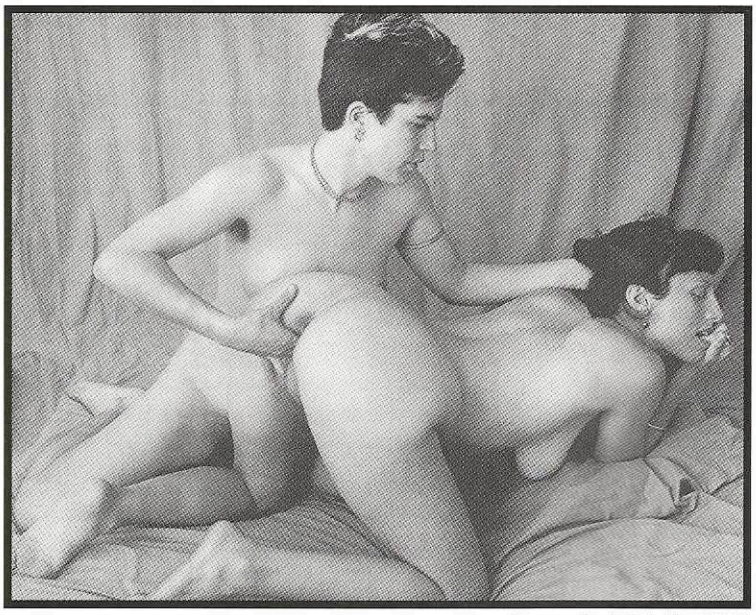


Madison, April.May 2003

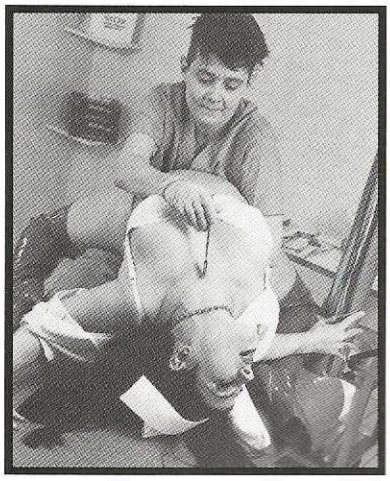
Nina + Babydoll, Aug.Sept 2003



Ariel + Aimee, June.July 2002

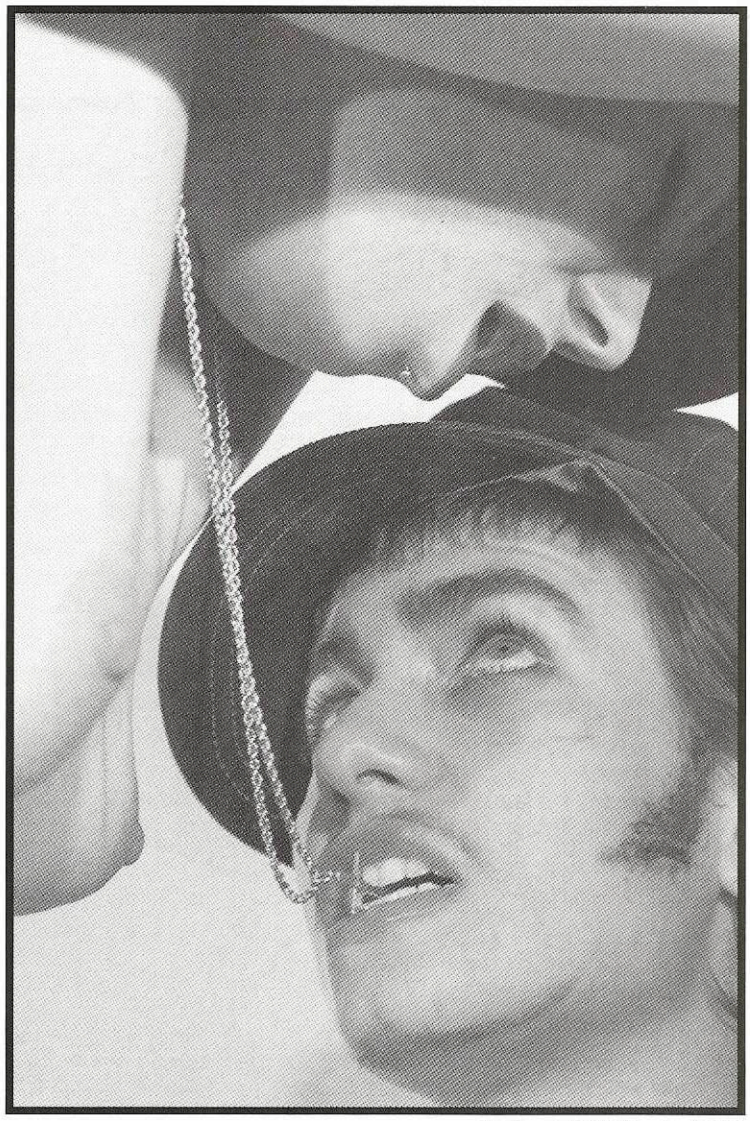


Brett + Revi, Feb.Mar 2002

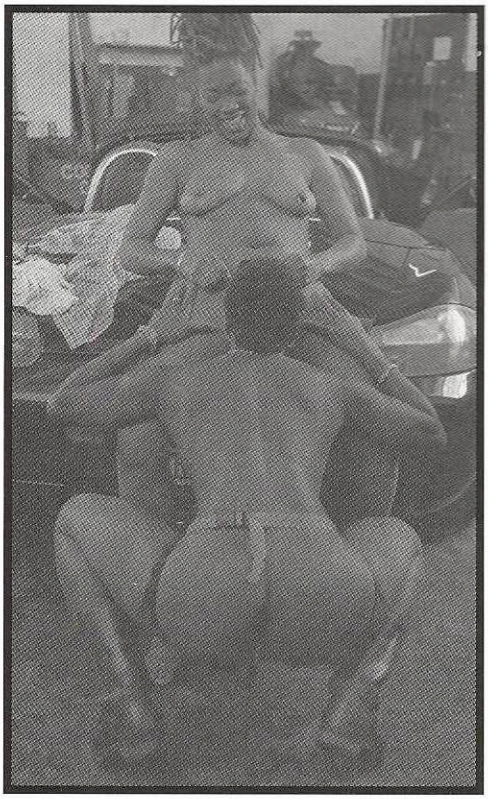


Nellie + Dr. Brennan, April.May 2000

Parker + Michou, Aug.Sept 2003

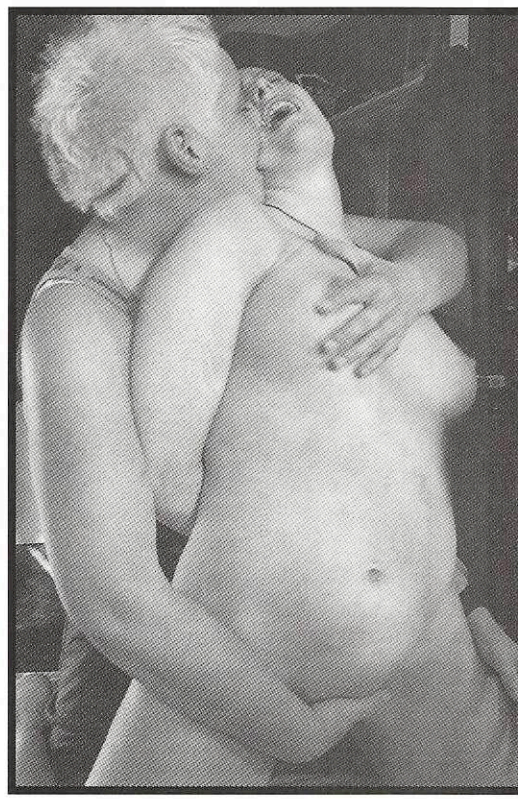


Ondine + Sybil, Dec.Jan 2004



Frankie + Dymond, Feb.Mar 1999

Corey, June.July 2002



Parker + Angela, Feb.Mar 2004

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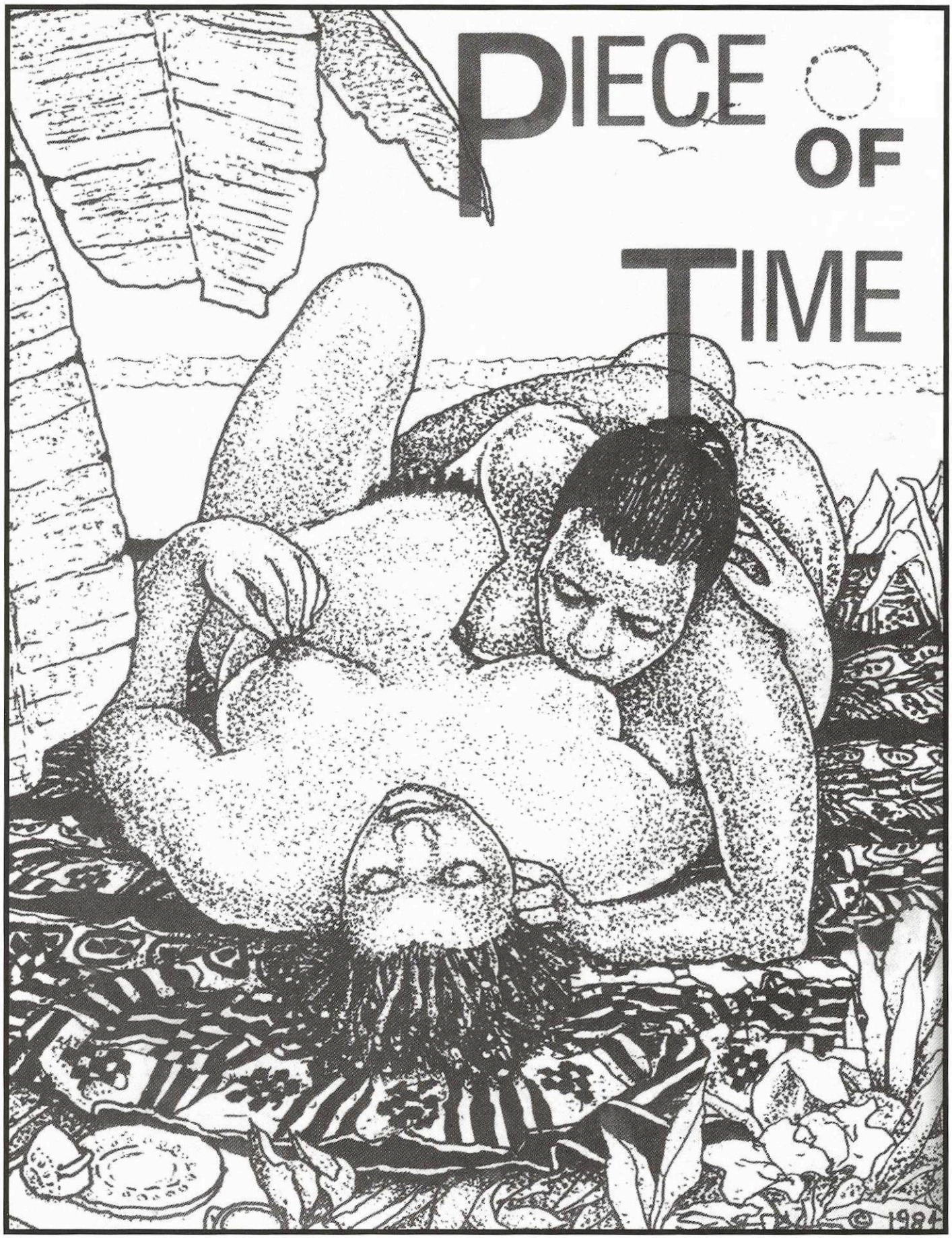

by JEWELLE GOMEZ • illustration by SARITA JOHNSON

This story was originally published in the first issue of **On Our Backs**, Summer 1984.

Ella kneeled down to reach behind the toilet. Her pink cotton skirt was pulled tight around her brown thighs. Her skin glistened with sweat from the morning sun and her labor. She moved quickly through the hotel rooms sanitizing tropical mildew and banishing sand. Each morning our eyes met in the mirror just as she wiped down the tiles and I raised my arms in a last wake-up stretch. I always imagined that her gaze flickered over my body; enjoying my broad, brown shoulders or catching a glance of my plum-brown nipples as the African cloth I wrapped myself in dropped away to the floor. For a moment I imagined the pristine hardness of the bathroom tiles at my back and her damp skin pressed against mine.

"OK, it's finished here," Ella said as she folded the cleaning rag and hung it under the sink. She turned around and, as always, seemed surprised that I was still watching her. Her eyes were light brown and didn't quite hide her smile; her hair was dark and pulled back, tied in a ribbon. It hung lightly on her neck the way that straightened hair does. My own was in short tight braids that brushed my shoulders, a colored bead at the end of each. It was a trendy affectation I'd indulged in for my vacation. I smiled. She smiled back. On a trip filled with so much music, laughter, and smiles, hers was the one that my eyes looked for each morning. She gathered the towels from the floor and in the same motion opened the hotel room door.

"Good-bye."

"See ya," I said, feeling about 12 years old instead of 30. She shut the door softly behind her, and I listened to the clicking of her silver bangle bracelets as she walked around the verandah toward the stairs. My room was the last one on the second level facing the beach. Her bangles brushed the painted wood railing as she went down them through the tiny courtyard and into the front office.

I dropped my cloth to the floor and stepped into my bathing suit. I planned to swim for hours and lie in the sun reading and sip margaritas until I could do nothing but sleep and maybe dream of Ella.

One day turned into another. Each was closer to my return to work and the city. I did not miss the city nor did I dread returning. But here it was as if time did not move. I could prolong any pleasure until I had my fill. The luxury of it was something from a fantasy in my childhood. The island was a tiny neighborhood gone to sea. The music of the language, the fresh smells, and deep colors all enveloped me. I clung to the bosom of this place. All else disappeared.

In the morning, too early for her to begin work in the rooms, Ella passed below in the courtyard carrying a bag of laundry. She deposited the bundle in a bin, then returned. I called down to her, my voice whispering in the cool, private morning air. She looked up, and I raised my cup of tea in invitation. As she turned in from behind the beach end of the courtyard I prepared another cup.

Her middle finger slipped past the SOFT OUTER LIPS and entered me so gently that at first I didn't feel it.

We stood together at the door, she more out than in. We talked about the fishing and the rainstorm of two days ago and how we'd spent Christmas.

Soon she said, "I better be getting to my rooms."

"I'm going to swim this morning," I said.

"Then I'll be coming in now, all right? I'll do the linen." She began to strip the bed. I went into the bathroom and turned on the shower.

When I stepped out, the bed was fresh and the covers snapped firmly around the corners. The sand was swept from the floor tiles back outside and our tea cups put away. I knelt to rinse the tub.

"No, I can do that. I'll do it, please." She came toward me, a look of alarm on her face. I laughed. She reached for the cleaning rag in my hand as I bent over the suds, then she laughed too. As I kneeled on the edge of the tub, my cloth came unwrapped and fell in. We both tried to retrieve it from the draining. My feet slid on the wet tile, and I sat down on the floor with a thud.

"Are you hurt?" she said, holding my cloth in one hand, reaching out to me with the other. She looked only into my eyes. Her hand was soft and firm on my shoulder as she knelt down. I watched the muscles in her forearm, then traced the soft inside with my hand. She exhaled slowly. I felt her warm breath as she bent closer to me. I pulled her down and pressed my mouth to hers. My tongue pushed between her teeth as fiercely as my hand on her skin was gentle.

Her arms encircled my shoulders. We lay back on the tile, her body atop mine; then she removed her cotton T-shirt. Her brown breasts nestled insistently against me. I raised my leg between hers. The moistness that matted the hair there dampened my leg. Her body moved in a brisk and demanding rhythm.

I wondered quickly if the door was locked, then was sure it was. I heard Ella call my name for the first time. I stopped her with my lips. Her hips were searching, pushing toward their goal. Ella's mouth on mine was sweet and full with hungers of its own. Her right hand held the back of my neck, and her left hand found its way between my thighs brushing the hair and flesh softly at first, then playing over the outer edges. She found my clit and began moving back and forth. A gasp escaped my mouth, and I opened my legs wider. Her middle finger slipped past the soft outer lips and entered me so gently that at first I didn't feel it. Then she pushed inside, and I felt the dams burst. I opened my mouth and tried to swallow my scream of pleasure. Ella's tongue filled me and

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WHAT SHE DID WITH HER HANDS

by DOROTHY ALLISON

This story was originally published in the Spring 1988 issue of **On Our Backs**.

For years I didn't really understand it–the way women would look at each other's hands across the bar, the way some women's glance would trail up from the fingers to the swell of the knuckles, past the wrist to the forearm, and then look away suddenly if they saw me watching them. I used to hang out at the only gay bar in Tallahassee, Florida, and watch women stare as the tall, slim-lipped bartender would lift four beer bottles together, their pupils reflecting the cable-like tightening of the muscles from her wrist to elbow. I watched the other women lick their lips, look away and inevitably look back again, and I knew by their manner that it was about *sex*.

I'd look back myself, admire the bartender's jaw, black eyes and the curling short hair on her neck. I loved the way her hips moved, the way her tongue would peek out between her lips when she was counting change, but I didn't really see the power of her hands. They were small, finely shaped, and the nails were trimmed down and filed, but then most lesbians wore their nails that way. It was nothing special as far as I could see. I would look back to see what all the women were watching, but I couldn't quite figure it out.

There was a whole language in the subtle movements of women's hands on a shot glass, but for me it was like hearing someone speak French. Even what I thought I understood turned out to be mostly misunderstanding. A raised eyebrow, a direct glance, or a shy tongue appearing suddenly on a full lip were all obvious evidence of erotic interest, and I knew how to respond. But a woman who cracked her knuckles while looking into my eyes confused me. I suspected she might want something of me I might not want to give.

The older butchy women I liked best seemed to think that I would surely catch fire if they held me down and fucked me. I responded powerfully to being held down but not so well to fucking. Years of severe and persistent endometriosis had convinced me that nobody could possibly enjoy fucking. Well, one or two fingers perhaps, during that time of the month when you want to howl at the moon anyway, but not more than that, and certainly not with any kind of sudden or forceful movement. The kind of sustained and forceful fucking that made women with big powerful forearms so attractive was unimaginable to me. I was a master at coming by rocking on my partner's thigh or pulling my thigh muscles tighter and tighter while I sucked and tongued at my partner's clit. But fucking hurt me, and I'd only do it if my partner insisted, biting my lips and giving it up like a gift too costly to offer often. It wasn't until my mid-20s, well on in my life as a lesbian, that I finally had the surgery for what had plagued me since my adolescence.

Curing my endometriosis changed my life. After that when the moon came on me, and a woman pushed three fingers into my wet and aching vagina, I got the shock of my life. There was no pain; there was a heated rush of desire. I wanted that hand. I wanted it hard. I wanted it fast. I wanted it as long as she could keep giving it to me. I remembered every bartender I had ever seen pick up a handful of cold bottles, and in the middle of an orgasm I laughed out loud. I had acquired the language.

"Speak to me," I told my lover. Without knowing what the hell I was talking about, she did just the right thing. She slipped another finger inside me and started all over again.

In the movie in my head, fisting is as savage as big cats rolling over each other in a jungle clearing. The instant of being entered is as abrupt and shuddering as a flying kick. In my bed, however, fisting is neither savage nor abrupt. It is slow, measured, enticed, and enticing. My women take their time, sometimes to my great frustration. When I beg them to move faster and harder, they just go on taking their time, putting in only as many fingers as the drum-ring entrance to my vagina will allow. They work me up slow, making sure that I am as open and aroused as possible. It is slow, teasing work getting a whole hand in my cunt. But if it were easy, I don't think I would enjoy it half so much. Part of the charge is the excess of the act.

If we have to work on it, then it's about submission. If it's easy, then it's more about the physical sensation. It's the overwhelming aspect of it, the being totally carried away, shouting demands, shrieking to be fucked. The fact that it's hard makes it better, more satisfying.

I don't react to fucking like a character in a jack-off manual. My women almost never get their fists going in and out the way it's described in cheap pornography. Once the fist is fully inside, the motion is a slow, sliding back and forth movement with the wrist sometimes swiveling enough to turn the knuckles up, pushing toward that mythological G spot where all the nerves leading to the clit seem to cross.

I don't spurt the way some women do. Push me hard there, though, and I might pee. That's excessive too, the idea that we are fucking so hard and so furiously that I will just pee all over us. I like that. I like the idea of being that far out of control. Even the moment when I am shocked and embarrassed has an enjoyable aspect. Just

so long as we don't stop, and especially if I am told that she wants it, wants me to let myself go like that, the thought turns around and I'm proud of myself. We are bad girls together, enjoying ourselves.

The first woman I ever really fisted was a big butch girl–a tall muscley woman who left working on her motorcycle to polish my belt buckle, get me a cup of tea, and blush when I hooked my fingers in her belt. She had been flirting with me and my girlfriend, and we were both enjoying her enormously. It was my girlfriend who checked it out with her girlfriend and got us all together at a party later.

"What do you want?" I kept teasing that girl, enjoying the size of her, the stretch of her shoulders and the slow gliding way she moved.

"What can you do?" she replied, looking down at us. We were both so much smaller than her. *Well, what?* I wondered, but my pride wouldn't let me show her any uncertainty. I squeezed her, pinched her, and ran my hands over her body as firmly as possible, enjoying every little sigh and quiver she made. I was looking forward to watching my girlfriend fuck her, but somehow when we had her lying back and her jeans off and her legs spread, it was my fingers that were teasing at her slippery labia. I slid my thumb inside her and felt around. It was smooth and open and welcoming. I pulled back and slipped two fingers in and looked up into her half-closed eyes. There was lots of room. I pulled back and went in again with three fingers, then four. Her next sigh was deeper, and she shuddered slightly in our arms.

I looked at my girlfriend. She was smiling and nodding, watching my fingers closely. I laughed and pulled back, cupping my fingers. I was going to push, slowly, feel my way tenderly, but the big girl had other ideas. It felt almost as if she reached for me with her whole body. My hand disappeared, sucked in to the warm, enclosing glove of her. I gasped, and my girlfriend laughed. I wiggled my fingers and felt the walls of the surrounding vagina balloon out and in on my hand. I closed my hand inside her, and the big girl rocked on my wrist.

"Goddamn!" Everybody around me laughed. I had never felt anything so extraordinary in my life. I tried to remember everything anybody had ever done to me that I liked. All right, I told myself and started moving my hand, the motion flowing from my elbow while I watched her face. When she started moaning and rocking with excitement, I let the muscles in my upper arm go to work. I felt my whole arm working. I wanted to do it right. All of my senses came alive. I needed to feel every motion she made, smell her as she got hotter, hear her guttural cries and slow grunting pleas. I wanted to shout, but that would have distracted me. I tried instead to speak the language of her body. I felt a hot sweat break out all over me, and every time I looked to the side I saw a proud, happy smile on my girlfriend's face.

"This role reversal stuff," I told her, "I like it a lot."

"Uh-huh," she laughed back at me. "I can see that."

I know remarkably few women who enjoy anal fisting. But there was a time in my life when I became quite accomplished at it. Not that I listed being fisted up the ass as a goal–I just had lots of fantasies about anal sex, and I told a woman I was seeing at the time about those fantasies. Natalia was much older than me, and we had been playing schoolgirl and governess. When I was the governess, Natalia was my toddler who needed to be washed tenderly, powdered down, sometimes have her temperature taken–"Turn over, baby"–and invariably be nuzzled gently until she orgasmed in my arms. When I was the schoolgirl, I was a stubborn adolescent who accumulated countless demerits and had to be taught how to wash behind her ears and between her thighs. After weeks of this play and lots of talk about our mutual fantasies, Natalia decided she would like to play out one of hers and see if she couldn't train her schoolgirl to enjoy having her ass used.

"For me," she begged, feeding me warm baklava and cold dry wine. I didn't know if the butterflies in my tummy were from her suggestion or the snack, but I agreed. Thus began a period of about three months in which I spent at least two nights a week lying belly down on her big oak bed stand while she whispered threatening enticements into my ears and slipped magic greasy fingers up my butt. She took her time getting me used to her manipulations and refused to tell me just how many fingers had done what at any one time. Regardless, it didn't seem to take very long until I was comfortable enough with what she was doing to climb up on my knees and start pushing back at her thrusts.

"That's my girl," Natalia would purr, and reward me with the fast slippery swipes at my clit that always made me come.

Finally, one evening Natalia asked me to come early and have dinner. She served raw oysters, lots of wine, and a big salad, and after dinner sent me off to clean myself out and lie for a while in a hot bubble bath with a glass of cognac while she did some tidying up. When Natalia came for me later I was pink all over, giggly, and very tipsy. She was wearing her highest heels and the black jacket with the high collar and the tight fitting sleeves. Without a word she wrapped me in a big towel, bundled me into the bedroom, and plopped me face-down on an enormous pillow on the floor. Before I could hiccup in confusion she had my wrists tied to a ring in the floor.

Fisting is AS SAVAGE AS big cats rolling over each other in a jungle clearing.

"Ma'am?" I tried, unsure which game we were going to play.

"Be still," she said sternly. "Don't think, just relax. I want something from you, and tonight I'm going to get it." She poured a pool of thick, creamy lotion into her palm and began to massage my ass, her blunt fingers pushing dollops of cream up into my butt. I hiccuped, giggled, and after a moment, wiggled my ass at her. She laughed, slapped my thighs, and leaning forward, placed a small, silver, bullet-shaped object in my hand.

"Take a deep breath of that," she told me,

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piece of time

sucked up my joy. We lay still for a moment, our breathing and the seagulls the only sounds. Then she pulled herself up.

"Miss..." she started.

I cut her off again, this time my fingers to her lips, "I think its OK if you stop calling me 'Miss'!"

"Carolyn," she said softly, then covered my mouth with hers again. We kissed for moments that wrapped around us, making time have no meaning. Then she rose. "It gets late, you know," she said with a giggle, then pulled away with her determination not yielding to my need. "I have my work, girl...and I see my boyfriend on Wednesdays. I better go. I'll see you later."

And she was out the door. I lay still on the tile floor and listened to her bangles as she ran down the stairs.

Later on the beach my skin tingled, and the sun pushed my temperature higher. I stretched out on the deck chair with my eyes closed. I felt her mouth, her hands, and the sun on me and came again.

Ella arrived each morning. There were only five left. She tapped lightly, then entered. I would look up from the small table where I'd prepared tea. She sat and we sipped slowly, then slipped into bed. We made love, sometimes gently, other times with a roughness resembling the waves that crashed the sea wall below.

We talked of her boyfriend, who was married and saw her only once or twice a week. She worked two jobs, saving money to buy land, maybe on this island or her home island. We were the same age, and although my life seemed to already contain the material things she was striving for, it was I who felt rootless and undirected.

We talked of our families, hers so dependent on her help, mine so estranged from me; of growing up, the path that led us to the same but different place. She loved this island. I did too. She could stay. I could not.

On the third night of the five I said, "You could visit me, come to the city for a vacation or–"

"And what I'm goin' to do there?"

I was angry but not sure at whom–at her for refusing to drop everything and take a chance; at myself for not accepting the sea that existed between us, or just the blindness of the circumstance.

I felt narrow and self-indulgent in my desire for her. An ugly, black American, everything I'd always despised. Yet I wanted her, somehow, somewhere it was right that we should be together.

On the last night after packing I sat up with a bottle of wine, listening to the waves beneath my window and the tourist voices from the courtyard. Ella tapped at my door as I was thinking of going to bed. When I opened it she came in quickly and thrust an envelope and a small gift-wrapped box into my hand.

"Can't stay, you know. He's waiting down there. I'll be back in the morning." Then she ran out and down the stairs before I could respond.

Early in the morning she entered with her key. I was awake but lying still. She was out of her clothes and beside me in moments. Our lovemaking began abruptly but built slowly. We touched each part of our bodies, imprinting memories on our fingertips.

"I don't want to leave you," I whispered.

"You not leaving me. My heart go with you, just I must stay here."

Then... "Maybe you'll write to me. Maybe you'll come back, too."

I started to speak but she quieted me.

"Don't make promises now, girl. We make love."

Her hands on me and inside me pushed the city away. My mouth eagerly drew in the flavors of her body. Under my touch the sounds she made were of ocean waves, rhythmic and wild. We slept for only a few moments before it was time for her to dress and go on with her chores.

"I'll come back to ride with you to the airport?" she said with a small question at the end.

"Yes," I said, pleased.

In the waiting room she talked lightly as we sat: stories of her mother and sisters, questions about mine. We never mentioned the city or tomorrow morning.

When she kissed my cheek she whispered, "sister love" in my ear, so softly I wasn't sure I'd heard it until I looked in her eyes. I held her close for only a minute, wanting more, knowing this would be enough for the moment. I boarded the plane and time began to move again.

Jewelle Gomez is the author of *The Gilda Stories.*

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what she did with her hands

still pushing at my ass. I did, and was rewarded with a slow spiral of pin lights that rose from the base of my nose up to my brain. The room got hot. I got dizzy, and a beehive started buzzing in my ears. I had never done poppers before, didn't know that was what I was doing. I just knew I was suddenly high and horny and desperate to push back at her pushing hands.

"Ma'am," I wailed, and she purred back at me, "That's my girl," while her hand worked its way steadily into my butt. She hurt me, and I screamed at her. She laughed at me, and I howled at her. But she'd had all that practice and knew every crevice, every rudimentary panic, every movement I would make in response to every movement of hers, and nothing I did or said or cried stopped her. After a while she wasn't hurting me, she was guiding me, whispering soft words while her fingers played tickle touch so deep inside me I wanted to burp. I was gasping and begging and coming every little while as easily as a big sponge choo-choo train would fall off a cartoon trestle. Everything was slow motion, overwhelming, and marvelous.

"Fuck me, ma'am. Oh, fuck me," I kept begging her.

"Oh, I am," she kept telling me. "I am. I am. I am."

The sun was coming up when she slid her hand out of me finally and completely. I burst into tears and tried to grab her with my thighs. I wanted it back, that full, marvelous, scary, wonderful feeling. She had pulled the slipknot loose on my hands hours before, and I was free to be coaxed up into the bed to wrap around her and fall asleep, but groggy as I was, I didn't want to sleep. Even if I couldn't move, I wanted to do it again. I pulled her hand up, cradled it to my cheek, and ran my fingers along her forearm. I dreamed of bartenders; slow-eyed, grinning butch-girls; and big cats rolling over the jungle floor–big cats with wide, wide mouths, great hanging wet labia, and muscley tapered forepaws. That woman spoke my language; what she could do with those hands. Oh!

Dorothy Allison is the author of *Bastard Out of Carolina.*

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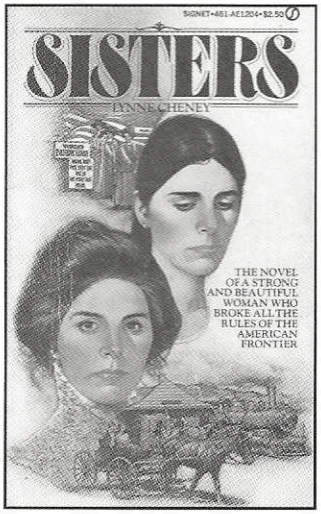
compiled by Diana Cage

"They're both very testy, tough, macho, so I guess it could easily go on to the next level. If they didn't like something, they'd let you know it."

New York City apartment building doorman to Gay City News *on a brutal assault in a West Village apartment in New York in which one lesbian allegedly attacked a lesbian neighbor with a hammer. Both women are in their 60s.*

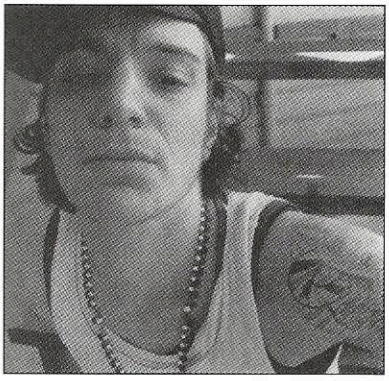


"Let us go away together, away from the anger and imperatives of men. There will be only the two of us, and we will linger through long afternoons of sweet retirement. In the evenings I shall read to you while you work your cross-stitch in the firelight. And then we shall go to bed, our bed, my dearest girl."

Excerpt from Lynne Cheney's lesbian novel Sisters, *which will not be reissued this year by her publisher at her request.*

The **chic came out of the closet**, but so did the non-chic, and honestly **we wanted most of the latter to go back in:** Ellen, Rosie, Siegfried, and those other guys, the Indigo Girls... sensible shoes, cats, herbal teas, and the Good Vibrations catalog all prospered while our male fascination withered.

Scott Omelianuk in a story titled "Why Middle-American Masturbators are Tired of Lesbians" in Details.



I suppose I do feel less and less queer—until I hang out with non-trans straight guys. Then I realize that even though I'm a man who loves ladies, I will always be queer. And that's fine with me.

Queer hip hop artist Katastrophe discussing the effect that his gender transition will have on his art in Bitch.

"I ain't into faggots. I don't like gay people around me, because I'm not comfortable with what their thoughts are. I'm not prejudiced. I just don't go with gay people and kick it—we don't have that much in common. I'd rather hang out with some straight dude. But women who like women, that's cool. I could actually get into that, having a woman who likes women, too. We might have more in common."

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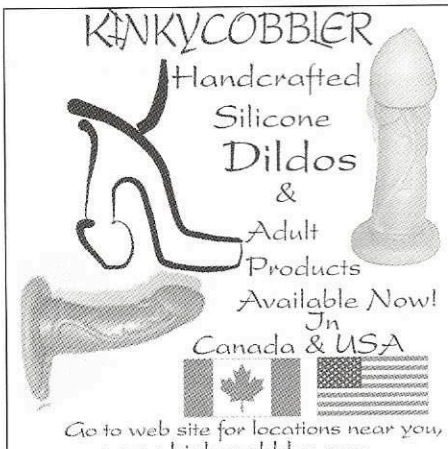

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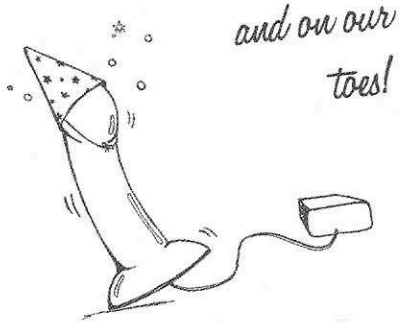

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ilmit
VoiceID: 14783
If I could be anywhere at the moment: "Standing barefoot in the kitchen with my future sweetie, hugging in the cold keeping ourselves warm with our body heat."

nastenkashue
VoiceID: 355226
Last great book I read: "1. *Keep the Aspiditria Flying*, George Orwell 2. *Accordian Crimes*, Annie Proulx

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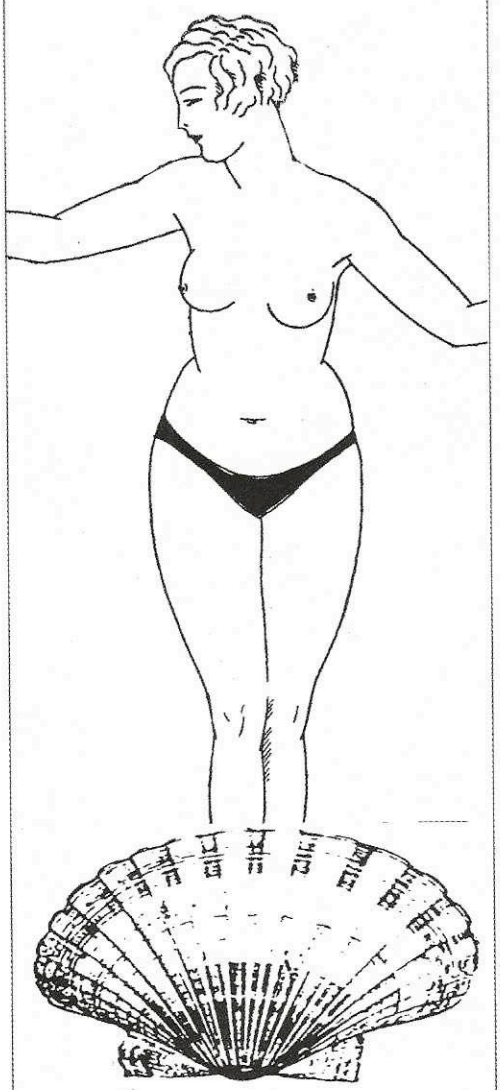

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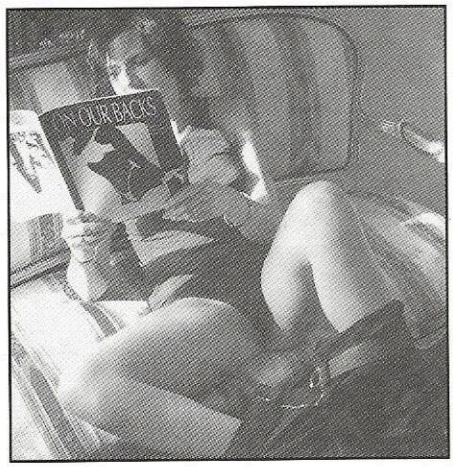
What was your **first date with** On Our Backs?

compiled by Shar Rednour



SHELLEY AMRICH

Moving Experience

My experimental video teacher and I were lying naked together using our bodies as landscapes for her new video. It was the 1980's. "I've heard they're making lesbian porn in San Francisco," she said. A chill ran up my spine. We got the issue with Jill Posner's shot of Kitty Tsui's strong bare back. I packed my darkroom into my little hatchback and drove from my small, New York State hometown to this mysterious land of lesbian porn, and was that the best decision I ever made! *Phyllis Christopher, photographer*

Blown Away

I was newly out when I walked into the Oscar Wilde bookstore on Christopher Street in New York. Big, naked women kissing on the cover of **On Our Backs** was the first thing I spotted. Seeing those women taught me a lot about my own fat phobia, about my queerness, and about the massive differences in what women look like. **On Our Backs**, with all its subversiveness, taught me how to be a feminist. *Chloe Jo, fashion, music, and boi maven*

Eager Beaver

I was 20 years old and working as a dancer at the Lusty Lady Theater when I first saw **On Our Backs.** I had no idea what kind of magazine it was. As I looked at the images and read the text, my breath became shallow and my pussy got wet. I was confused. I wanted to devour the contents, but I was too embarrassed. Now when I'm out and about and I see issues of **On Our Backs**, my pussy still gets wet and I proudly pick it up and devour its contents! *Simone de la Ghetto, Artistic Director of Harlem Shake Burlesque*

Sweetest Thing

I remember meeting Susie Bright in front of the Roxie Theater in 1985. I assumed she would be in leather, or maybe naked! She sauntered up wearing a flowered dress, her hair in a ponytail, and sporting cat-eye glasses! Heavens! Susie was–and still is–so darn nice and polite. I learned then what I have seen over and over since: behind pens of porn you'll often find the sweetest flowers. *Louise Rafkin, author of* Other People's Dirt

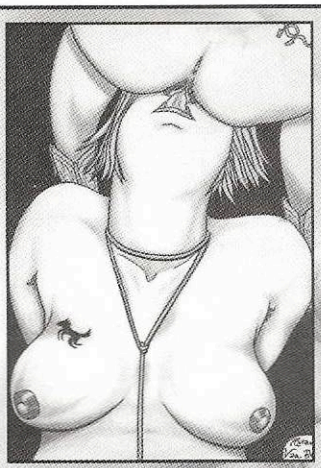
The Queers Are Alright

Two years ago I was a student at Mills College when my fierce femme friend, Trouble, took me to A Different Light in the Castro to show me **On Our Backs**. The women in it all looked so queer. There were leatherdykes, butches, and every one else; and I thought, *alright! Vlasta*

Saved by Porn

In 1991, I was singing for my dinner on street corners in New Orleans. This meant singing enough for a beer, then getting the free red beans and rice at happy hour. I'd had a homophobic moment and was homesick for some hardcore dyke company, so I went to the local gay men's leather store in search of **On Our Backs**. The friendly leather bear went to the back of the store and unlocked a glass case to retrieve their hidden copy; it was illegal to sell it in Louisiana. I couldn't afford it, but he let me bask in the images of naked girls and nasty words. *Jackie Strano, cofounder S.I.R. Productions*

tell us! What is your most secret sexual fantasy? Let us know by June 20, 2004 and we'll send you a free issue. Write **On Our Backs** 3415 César Chávez, Suite 101, San Francisco, CA 94110; fax 415-648-4705; e-mail: onourbacks@onourbacksmag.com.



Artist for *"On Our Backs"*
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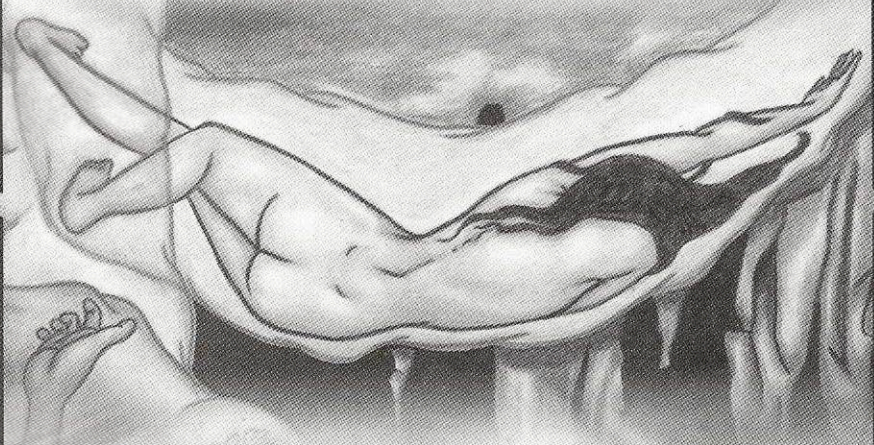

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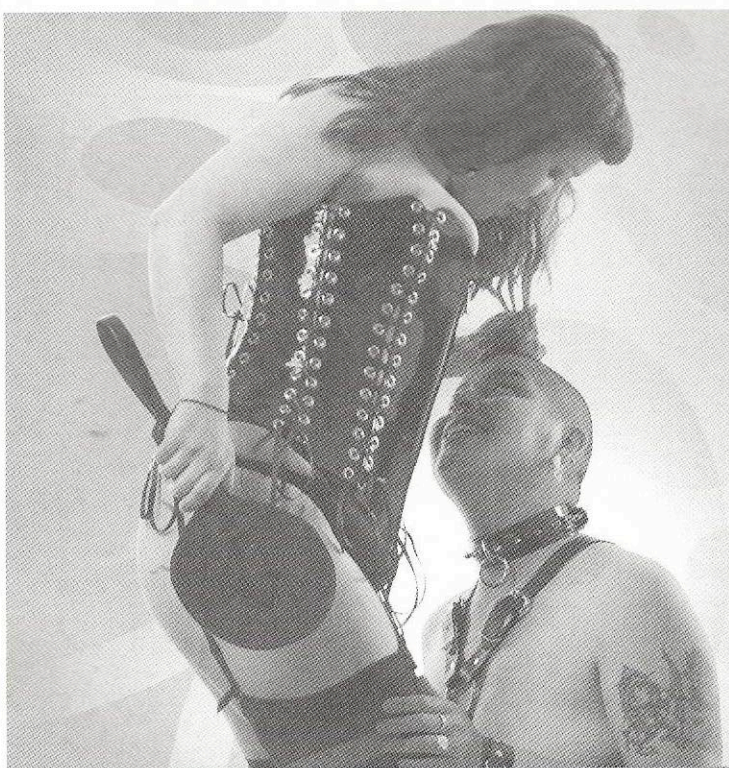

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